

Houston Graduate School of Theology

Spiritual Direction's Impact on the Transformation of Self

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Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor Ministry

by

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Spiritual Direction's Impact on the Transformation of Self

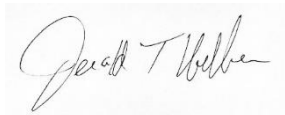
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Aundrea J. Baker".

Aundrea J. Baker

Acknowledgments

To my husband, thank you for your continued love and support over the years.

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Preface

The practicum, “Spiritual Direction’s Impact on the Transformation of Self,” was initiated with the objective of bridging the gap between church attendance and Christian discipleship. In over twenty years of working in church leadership, it was observed by the project director that church attendance did not necessarily translate to transformation for even the most devout Christians. Spiritual direction was discovered while pursuing a Master of Divinity degree at Houston Graduate School of Theology. It was observed that spiritual direction was something that could have a significant impact on an individual’s spiritual formation journey. This happened while co-pastoring a church plant with her husband, so the focus at the time was on evangelism and church growth.

During her tenure as a pastor, a passion was developed for individual transformation. She agonized over the fact that congregants were not experiencing a transformed life. In fact, she lamented over the fact of not experiencing more personal transformation. When pastoral leadership ended, consideration about the impact of spiritual direction on transformation was remembered. The opportunity was taken through this degree program to gain knowledge of and practical experience in spiritual direction. The belief was that spiritual direction was the essential component to fill the gap between church attendance and Christian discipleship. This report was written with the belief that it will aid church leaders in their knowledge of spiritual direction and persuade them to include it in the services that their churches provide.

Abstract

Regardless of the era or the faith tradition, spiritual direction is more about the character and lifestyle of the spiritual director than any style of direction. In general, spiritual direction through the centuries has been basically the same in methodology. To support this notion, research was done into the biblical, historical, and theological aspects of spiritual direction and followed by practical application through spiritual direction sessions. Based on the information gathered, it was concluded that, although the temperament of the spiritual director is important, openness to the presence of God and submission to direction of the Holy Spirit are imperative.

Chapter I

Introduction

The pursuit of identity is a quest common to all human beings. People often want to understand who they are and why they were born. As children, they form attachments to family members and friends that provide them with a foundational identity and a sense of belonging. As they grow older, they become involved in organizations, groups, and activities to further define themselves. In this pursuit, some become attached to one or more of the various forms of Christian ministry or church. Henri Nouwen explains that people tend to believe three lies about identity in this pursuit—that they are defined by what they do, what others say about them, and what they have.¹ Individuals will commit time, talents, and finances to those things that they believe outline their identity. They will engage in practices and disciplines to further develop this self-constructed identity. They will form their value systems around them. This identity construct becomes the lens through which they perceive and judge the world and other people. When asked by others who they are, they will describe themselves according to the mechanisms of this identity.

Christian wisdom teachers often describe their life journeys and their pursuits of identity in their writings. In these works, they often divulge the various ways they attempted to define themselves through familial, societal, and/or social affiliations. Ultimately, they bless their readers by explaining how their pursuits led them to God.

1. Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*, Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird, eds. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 28–9.

These wisdom teachers often come to similar conclusions about their journeys to God. This conclusion links knowledge of God with self-knowledge. In his prayer in the opening chapter of *Confessions*, Augustine tells God that he “stimulates” man to praise him “because You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.”² In the latter half of this work, Augustine asks God, “Let me know you, my known; let me know Thee even as I am known.”³ The general premise is that, the more individuals know themselves, the more they will know God.

These wisdom teachers often sought out or stumbled upon assistance in their pursuits—they had mentors or spiritual directors. These spiritual directors were spiritually mature people who helped them in dealing with all the false attachments they had made in their pursuit of identity. They also helped them to see themselves and God more clearly. For example, Augustine’s first spiritual guide was his mother who passed on her beliefs to him when he was a youngster.⁴ Augustine left behind his mother’s faith as a young man and pursued a life of hedonistic pleasure. After years of living a wayward lifestyle in search of happiness, Augustine met Bishop Ambrose of Milan who was well-known internationally for his devoutness to God and his eloquence. Augustine tells God in *Confessions*, “Though I did not realize it, I was led to him by you so that, with full realization, I might be led to you by him.”⁵

2. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Rex Warner, trans. (New York: Signet Classic, 1963), 1.

3. Ibid., 202.

4. Ibid., 13.

5. Ibid., 96–7.

Spiritual direction can be helpful to individuals in their pursuits of identity in Christ. To move toward this identity, spiritual direction assists individuals in growth, healing, transformation, and wholeness. This spiritual direction practicum analyzes the methodology of this spiritual director in the practice of guiding individuals in these areas. At the onset, definition of some key aspects that are foundational to the practicum are necessary. First, there is this spiritual director's definitions of spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual direction. Second, there is a description of the context of the practicum. Finally, there is a listing of proposed outcomes of the practicum and the various tools the spiritual director will use to measure these outcomes.

Definitions

As the Creator, God is the ultimate source of all creation. Consequently, his essence is contained within everything he creates. God's essence establishes a connection between him and his creation as well as among all of creation. Human beings are the pinnacle of God's creation, and each human being born into the world is uniquely designed by him. God places each human being in a designated family to live in a particular place during a certain time in history. Each human being is born a specific race, ethnicity, and gender with a distinctive mix of abilities, skills, and talents. This precision in design makes each human being an individual, a one-of-a-kind creation. There is no other person ever born with those characteristics and into those same sorts of conditions. These unique factors influence an individual's formation and his or her identity. Everything about human life from the beginning is spiritual and designed by God to bring them closer to him.

Although everything about life is spiritual, spirituality is basically one's own creation. This fact makes individuals' spirituality as unique as they are. Contrary to what the term seems to imply, spirituality is not about religion. Even those who do not engage in religious practice or believe in God have a spirituality. Overall, spirituality consists of the methods of searching for meaning and purpose in life. It is a search for one's unique and authentic identity, David Benner suggests that this "spiritual desire" is "the response of spirit to Spirit—the Holy Spirit calling us home to our place and identity in God."⁶

Spirituality is differentiated by the areas of life on which people focus as they search for meaning and identity. This notion implies that whatever a person pours attention into is his or her spirituality. In addition, wherever the attention goes, energy and love go as well. Spirituality informs everything in life including how one engages with God and with others.

Spirituality can be observed through behaviors and attitudes, which observation can point to where people place their focus. For example, some may focus their primary attention, energy, and love in creating a lifestyle signified by success and wealth. In their search for meaning and identity, they may have received societal messages that informed them that success and wealth are the areas where authentic identity can be found. They believe that identity is defined by what they do, what people say about them, and what they have, as suggested by Nouwen. Even the way they organize their days revolves around this belief. With this focus, they attempt to craft a self that seems to fit the mold

6. David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 16, Kindle.

of a successful person. In this type of search for meaning, uniqueness, and authenticity, however, they actually are becoming like everyone else around them.

This concept of spirituality is also true for those who have chosen to find their identity in Christ. They center their focus on finding meaning and purpose in the words and ways of Christ, and their attention, energy, and love revolve around those things. This spirituality is a distinctly Christian spirituality. Benner suggests that “Christian spirituality has a great deal to do with the self, not just with God. The goal of the spiritual journey is the transformation of self. . . . This requires knowing both our self and God. Both are necessary if we are to discover our true identity as those who are ‘in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:17), because the self is where we meet God.”⁷

Individuals develop and define their spirituality by partaking in spiritual formation, which occurs whether individuals are intentional about it. In a broad sense, formation is about something becoming what it was designed to be or emerging from some type of protective covering into its true form. Formation does not signify the final product; rather, it is an opening up or a moving toward the final product. This movement is a journey and a process. According to Dallas Willard,

Spiritual formation, without regard to any specifically religious context or tradition, is the process by which the human spirit or will is given a definite ‘form’ or character. It is a process that happens to everyone. The most despicable as well as the most admirable of persons have had a spiritual formation. . . . Their spirits or hearts have been formed.⁸

Life experiences, culture, family, and friends are examples of the influences that surround individuals and contribute to their spiritual formation. In addition, one’s habits,

7. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 14, Kindle.

8. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 19.

addictions, mindsets, and goals also impact spiritual formation. With the understanding that various facets of individuals' lives can assist or hinder their spiritual formation, they can become intentional about the actions they take to experience spiritual formation in the way that they desire.

When spirituality focuses on growing in Christlikeness, disciples can intentionally focus spiritually formative efforts to help in that growth. This spiritual formation involves their journey or movement toward God—the Creator and source—who signifies the core of all things. The spiritual formation journey is to the core, where individuals experience the process of shedding the influences of their surroundings and allowing the emergence of their true selves as God intended in their creation. This transformation of self is a pathway to wholeness, a pathway to the true self, through the healing of false identities and soul wounds and growth into Christlikeness.

Spiritual direction can assist in the spiritual formation process. At its basis, “spiritual direction is concerned with helping a person directly with his or her relationship with God.”⁹ God is active constantly in the lives of people. Unfortunately, most people live unconscious to God’s activity in their lives. Spiritual direction entails a personal increase of awareness of God’s activity in one’s life by utilizing the spiritual guidance of another person. Spiritual direction helps individuals transform their understanding of God from a set of lifeless, biblical facts to a living reality. By knowing God as a lived experience, they open up to discovering their authentic identity as “true knowing of our self demands that we know our self as known by God.”¹⁰

9. William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 2nd ed., rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 5, Kindle.

10. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 18, Kindle.

In a safe and open space, spiritual directors help believers move toward living more aware of their lives with God. Directors provide a protective, non-anxious, non-judgmental presence for their directees to uncover their connection to God, a connection that was established at creation. In this space, God and the director can commune with the directee, offering guidance in that communication when necessary. Spiritual directors do not seek to counsel or instruct their directees. Instead, as Nouwen suggests, a spiritual director is “a mature person of faith willing to pray and respond with wisdom and understanding to questions about how to live spiritually in a world of ambiguity and distraction.”¹¹ Spiritual directors also assist individuals in creating space for God in their lives by offering suggestions for spiritual practices.

Informal spiritual direction can be a starting point for spiritual formation. Eugene Peterson attests that “most spiritual direction takes place spontaneously and informally in unplanned but ‘just right’ moments.”¹² These moments are God-initiated moments. He invites individuals to gain more awareness of his activity in their lives, and in his wisdom, he will place informal spiritual directors in their lives to offer them ways to grow in intimacy with him.

Formal spiritual direction is where two persons agree to enter a relationship with one person serving as the spiritual director and the other person as the directee. These persons “agree to give their full attention to what God is doing in one (or both) of their lives and seek to respond in faith.”¹³ Spiritual directors assist directees in creating space

11. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, ix.

12. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 160.

13. Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 150.

for God in their lives and opening themselves up to whatever God brings to them in that space. In this safe space, directees, increasingly, gain awareness of their internal, intimate relationship with God. This relationship “is established by the creation of human persons and exists even when they are unaware of its existence. I am a creature whether I know it or not, and God is my creator.”¹⁴ As individuals grow in awareness of this intimate connection, they grow in acceptance of God’s gift of love for them. Nouwen suggests that “God’s words, ‘you are my Beloved,’ reveal the most intimate truth about all human beings, whether they belong to any particular tradition or not. The ultimate spiritual temptation is to doubt this fundamental truth about ourselves and trust in alternative identities.”¹⁵

Spiritual directors’ guidance is practical and, therefore, can be offered to anyone. It is meant for both the ordinary person living an ordinary life and for the religious person living the ordained life. The practicality of the guidance helps the directees to understand that God is always present in their daily lives.

Spiritual direction is personal as it offers guidance based on the life experiences of the directee. The spiritual director offers directees a way to seek God and be with him in the present moment. This way of seeking opens directees to God’s influence in that present moment. This way of being is how directees create space for God in their lives.

Spiritual directors are experienced practitioners of the tenets of spiritual formation. They have obtained a mature level of outward expression of a life that seeks to grow in Christlikeness. Their task in spiritual direction is to listen well to God and their

14. Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 32, Kindle.

15. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 28.

directee. In the process of listening well, they help their directees learn to listen well to their lives and subsequently to God. They help them see the obstacles and wounds that have been preventing them from growing in Christlikeness and distracting them from their relationships with God. With this revelation, directees can become more conscious and uncover more of their true selves. The guidance of a spiritual director and the growing awareness of God's activity helps soften directees' receptivity to God's transformative work as they journey toward wholeness and toward their true self.

Context

A key factor in the process of spiritual direction is the context in which it takes place. As previously stated, individuals' spirituality and spiritual formation are influenced by outside forces such as relationships, culture, and society. The context informs individuals in their search for identity by communicating their meaning and purpose in the world around them. The following is a brief overview of the context in which the spiritual director conducted spiritual direction sessions for this practicum.

The spiritual director began offering spiritual direction sessions in May 2020. In the first few months of 2020, the world started to hear about a mysterious virus—COVID-19—that was infecting people in China. The virus became a media headline as it spread from China to other parts of the world including the U.S. In March, as a precautionary measure to stop the rapid spread, several state governments, including Texas, issued orders for statewide quarantines. The quarantine required that individuals stay at home unless it was necessary to go out for essentials. Businesses shut down. Churches halted in-person activities. Individuals were not able to go to work or socialize with family and friends. Children were not able to go to school. Panic ensued. The media,

health officials, and government representatives provided the general public with conflicting information about the virus, how it was spread, and how dangerous it was to individuals. As the virus spread across the country, death tolls and hospital occupancies increased. After several weeks of quarantine, some states began to ease restrictions as some government officials attempted to downplay the seriousness of the virus. This caused conflicts to arise among various factions of American citizenry, mostly along political lines. Those individuals who did not believe the virus was a serious health issue voiced outrage about the quarantine and the governmental guidelines mandating that individuals wear masks and practice social distancing in public spaces. On occasion, these conflicts erupted into violence causing an increase in fear and anxiety in an already tense atmosphere in the country.

By May, when the spiritual director started offering spiritual direction sessions, life had become chaotic for both director and directees. They were like all other Americans at the time trying to maintain the safety and financial security of their families amid a life-threatening pandemic. They had to adjust to remote learning for their children since schools did not reopen for in-person classes. Both director and directees decided to forego in-person meetings for safety reasons as well as for convenience since the demands of life during the pandemic required flexibility in their schedules. They arranged for an online video-conferencing platform for spiritual direction sessions.

After holding a few spiritual direction sessions in May, the director and directees were once again hit with a wave of national conflicts. George Floyd, an African American man, was killed by a white police officer. An individual videoed the entire incident on a cell phone and posted it on social media. The video went viral causing

outrage among individuals who saw this incident as racially motivated, and it sparked nationwide protests that lasted through the early fall. Although there had been previous protests and events around the issues of police brutality against African Americans, the Floyd murder aroused stronger nationwide feelings because the video showed the white officer kneeling on the neck of an unarmed Floyd for more than eight minutes as he and the nearby crowd pleaded for his life. Some of the subsequent protests resulted in violent confrontations between protestors and police and military personnel.

Since the spiritual director and her directees are African American, they had strong feelings about police brutality against African Americans as well as racial issues present in American society. Friends and family members became actively involved in the protests. At times, they found themselves having conversations about race with some of their white friends who were shocked by the George Floyd incident. They also witnessed other white friends and associates speak negatively about the protests and the protestors. They renounced the presence of racial issues in the country. This fact strained these relationships. The protests and the associated counterprotests by individuals against the idea of racial issues in America raised the temperature of an already stressed social climate in the nation.

In addition to the pandemic and protests against racial injustice, an unpleasant presidential election took place in 2020. The candidates were Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, and Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee. The political climate was divisive with friends and family members sometimes parting ways over differing political views. Politics can be unpleasant; however, the difference with the 2020 election was that the divisiveness sometimes became violent. In addition, some aspects of the political

environment became entwined with conspiracy theories and concerns related to evangelical Christianity. By tying the political divisiveness to Christianity, the spiritual director and her directees were left to question institutional Christianity. Although their faith in God never wavered, their beliefs in things they had learned and practiced through traditional church structures faltered.

All of these traumatic situations were loud and distracting to the spiritual direction process. At times, these situations made it difficult to move into a depth of self-discovery as it was difficult to hear God over the roar of nationwide fear and anxiety. At the same time, the spiritual direction was timely as it was a helpful way for both director and directees to cope with their personal fears and anxieties.

Outcomes

The spiritual director envisioned that both she and her directees would experience transformation of self through healing and growth from participating in spiritual direction sessions together. To experience these things, the director worked to cultivate an open and comforting atmosphere for spiritual direction sessions. Nouwen suggests that spiritual direction “provides the time and structure, wisdom and discipline, to create sacred space in your life in which God can act. By creating sacred space, you reserve a part of yourself and prevent your life from completely being filled up, occupied, or preoccupied.”¹⁶ He attests that this sacred space provides a location or an “address” for individuals to meet with God in prayer and offers an opportunity for God’s transformative work can take place.¹⁷ This atmosphere allows directees to actively

16. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, xv.

17. Ibid.

engage in their personal journey of spiritual formation—a journey toward the true self.

Three areas of focus work to cultivate this atmosphere—the spiritual director’s temperament, the experience of the session, and the needs of the directee(s).

The first outcome was to achieve a growing sense of wholeness through cleansing, healing, and growth, which are conducive to keeping the sessions free from obstacles that would hinder the hoped-for open and comforting nature. This process included:

- Maintaining a chart of the regular exercise of spiritual practices that address the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit;
- Maintaining a journal to reflect on the spiritual practices;
- Attending regular sessions with a spiritual director;
- Attending regular sessions with a spiritual direction supervisor; and
- Utilizing a Likert scale monthly to determine whether the spiritual practices and supervision allowed the director to experience a growing sense of wholeness.

The second outcome was to experience an open and comforting atmosphere during spiritual direction sessions. This process included:

- Consciously allowing the Holy Spirit to lead the direction of the session by intentionally talking less and utilizing silence and listening to discern what was transpiring between the Holy Spirit and the directee;
- Consciously staying present in the session by maintaining focus and engagement with the directee;
- Utilizing Likert scales to measure the director’s ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement; and
- Maintaining a journal to reflect on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation in the session.

The third outcome was to exhibit Spirit-led discernment regarding the directee’s needs by offering appropriate responses for engagement of soul work. This included:

- When appropriate, making suggestions for spiritual practices;
- Maintaining notes on directee's responses to these suggestions; and
- Utilizing Likert scales to measure directee's responses to the suggestions and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice.

These outcomes are evaluated in Chapter IV of this report. In the next chapter, the report provides the biblical, historical, theological, and practical research that proved foundational to the practicum and to the ongoing growth of this spiritual director.

Chapter II

An Exploration of Spiritual Direction and Development of an Application Strategy

Biblical Foundations

In metaphorical terms, the spiritual journey is a journey home. This home is the residence of individuals' true self, a place of identity. Individuals' true self, their true identity, is found in God, their Creator. Individuals long to return home, but they may not comprehend this longing. Spiritual direction creates a space for individuals to move along this journey toward their true self. The spiritual formation journey begins and ends with God. The following are biblical passages that demonstrate why and how this journey begins and ends with God. These passages communicate to spiritual directors their role in the process. They are not in charge. God is in charge.

Gen. 1:26–7, 2:7

The first few chapters of Genesis introduce readers to the protagonist in the creation story, God. In this story, God, the Creator, acts as an artist bringing his vision for the heavens, the earth, and humanity into reality. As with any artist, God creates with passion, contributing the fullness of himself to his creation. Intrinsically, he has a personal connection to everything he creates.¹ His personal connection welcomes his creation to share and participate in life with him. On the sixth day of the creation process,

1. Terence Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 341.

God performs his final act of creating by forming man. He seals this final act of creation by stating that he views his creation of man as “very good.” He is proud of his creation. By stating that he views man as very good, God is indicating his intentions for humanity. His love and creativity encompass “human beings, for they are created in the image of one who chooses to create in a way that shares power with others.”² He gifts man with the opportunity of dominion over the other aspects of his creation. “When God conveys blessing (see 1:22; 2:3), God gives power, strength, and potentiality to the creatures. Therefore, such action constitutes an integral part of the power-sharing image, a giving over of what is God’s to others to use as they will.”³ God’s intention is that humanity will use the power he gives them to bring all that he has created “toward its fullest possible potential. God intends from the beginning that things do not stay just as they were initially created. He creates a paradise, not a static state of affairs, but a highly dynamic situation in which the future lies open to various possibilities.”⁴ Humanity rises “to the position of God’s steward. It is to serve as a mediator and a conduit of goodness and health between the Source of goodness and the good creation.”⁵

God could have chosen to create his final creation, man, in any form, but he chooses to create man in his image and likeness. The Hebrew word for “image” conveys

2. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” 345.

3. Ibid., 346.

4. Ibid., 349.

5. W. Sibley Towner, “Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 4 (October 2005): 354, accessed July 27, 2019, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=11&sid=56b48009-dab2-42f7-8e78-fadeab36e1b7%40pdv-sessionmgr02>.

the idea of an object that is carved or molded to resemble the person who created it.⁶ It implies a visible representation of the creator. “The image functions to mirror God to the world, to be God as God would be to the human, to be an extension of God’s own dominion.”⁷ The idea is that God can be seen on earth through human beings. The Hebrew word for “likeness” relates to aspects of similarity that are not visible. Other usages of the term in the Bible “seem to imply a reflection or projection of a reality, more than the reality itself. But the resemblance can be very revealing of the prototype.”⁸ Because human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, male and female, they represent the diversity and the divine relationship that exists.⁹

By being created in God’s image, humans are a physical representation on earth of God. By being created in his likeness, they share in his character and his nature. As his ultimate act of creating human beings, God breathed into them giving them life. By bringing life to human beings through his divine breath, God becomes the ultimate source of their existence. As the source, the living breath, humanity cannot exist apart from God. The personal nature in which God created man suggests that there is an intimacy inherent in the relationship God has with humanity. Quaker theology defines this intimacy as human beings having “an Inner Light. Every soul contains this modicum of God’s own Spirit and energy.”¹⁰

6. Towner, “Clones of God,” 345–6.

7. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” 345.

8. Towner, “Clones of God,” 346–7.

9. Ibid., 343.

10. Towner, “Clones of God,” 350–1.

Although there is an intimate connection, God, as the source, does not seek to control or manipulate human beings to do his will. Instead, he chooses to make them free just as he is free. The freedom that God offers is not a state of being, nor is it about a hierarchal position on earth. Ultimately, humanity's freedom reflects the intimate nature of its relationship with God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that because of this intimate relationship, "Being free means 'being free for the other,' because the other has bound me to him. Only in relationship with the other am I free."¹¹ This freedom in relationship allows for human beings to decide whether they want to be in relationship with God as well as the amount of themselves they will give over to the relationship. There are many dynamics to this freedom, within which God offers human beings dominion and creative authority over the rest of creation. This freedom also offers humanity the ability to decide how it will follow God. Ultimately, this freedom exists to bring worship, praise, and glory to God by choosing him over everything, which is an act of trust and obedience to God's Word.

By forging humans in this manner, God created an intimate connection to his creation. Unfortunately, this connection became corrupted when Adam and Eve chose the fruit offered to them by the serpent over God's instructions, which included what the blessings and the limits were for living on earth. In a moment of human frailty and doubt, Adam and Eve chose to go against God, who had given them the freedom to make that choice. In that moment, they not only displayed disobedience, but a distrust of God. This disobedience and distrust were foundational to sin entering the story of the relationship between God and humanity as well as in tainting the intimate connection in that

11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Image of God on Earth," in *Creation and Fall Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 39–40.

relationship. Although this connection has been distorted because of sin, the connection remains. Since the time that sin originally affected this connection in the Garden of Eden, God has been reaching out to his children to redeem the connection. He loves his creation, and his love is what makes him continue to seek after them. This understanding offers the basic definition of humanity.¹²

Regardless of individuals' unique experiences and background, they are at their core a representation of God's image and they have the potential for his likeness. They also are greatly loved by God, who desires relationship with them. Peter Scazzero declares that "Christianity is not about our disciplined pursuit of God, but about God's relentless pursuit of us—to the point of dying on a cross for us that we might become his friends."¹³ He further attests that "the inexhaustible God loves us so intensely that every time we turn to him after wandering away from his love for us, all heaven breaks out in a thunderous celebration (see Luke 15:7)."¹⁴ God is working to restore this relationship, to restore his image, because he wants to see himself in his creation. Spiritual directors realize this basis and that their directees' spiritual journeys are journeys back to God's image and likeness, journeys wrapped in God's love.

12. Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), loc. 33-202, Kindle. Keating offers his analysis of the human condition and the obstacles that interfere with humans' intimate connection with God. He also explains the ways humans attempt to regain this connection as well as the ways in which God is seeking to reestablish this connection.

13. Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 53.

14. Ibid.

Psalm 139

Craig Broyles describes Psalm 139 as “perhaps the most intimate of psalms. It displays a striking awareness of God’s interests in individuals.”¹⁵ The composer of this psalm was someone who understood the intimate nature of the relationship between God and humanity. The psalmist does not compose this psalm as a person speaking about another person. The psalm is arranged as a direct dialogue between the psalmist and the one who loves the psalmist. The psalm reflects an understanding of how deeply that love runs. The psalmist is speaking to God, and God is present and listening to the psalmist. This is a personal and intimate communication.

Just as in the opening chapters of Genesis, this psalm invokes images of God as the Creator. Only the Creator would know his creation as well as the psalm expresses. He is not a distant creator who creates and disconnects from his creation, but he is a personal creator who loves his creation and desires to grow continually in relationship with them. The psalm opens with the psalmist expressing an understanding of just how intimately God has searched and thereby knows the psalmist. This fact suggests that “God himself participates in the process of becoming acquainted with us. His knowledge is not static; it too goes through a dynamic process.”¹⁶ God actively engages and grows in relationship and knowledge of his creation.

In the first six verses, God, as a personal Creator, knows every aspect of his creation. He knows what his creation is doing at all times; he knows their thoughts, their

15. Craig Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 483.

16. *Ibid.*, 484–5.

ways, and their words. This knowledge “signifies here divine discernment.”¹⁷ In this divine discernment, God protects his creation by forming a barrier of safety around them. He personally lays his hand upon them, which is not only a form of protection but also denotes blessing. Willem VanGemeran suggests, “This knowledge of God is nothing less than a knowledge that discerns and discriminates in favor of those who are loyal to the Lord. The discerning and favorable acts of God are gracious. It is grace that justifies, and it is by grace that humans are blessed.”¹⁸ This type of commitment, love, and concern is awe-inspiring to the psalmist. The psalmist knows that humans are incapable of this type of love; it is too lofty for them to attain.

In vv. 7–12, the psalmist’s mood shifts. The awesomeness of God’s knowledge of the psalmist seems to become overwhelming, and he speaks of fleeing from God’s presence. The psalmist realizes, however, that there is nowhere humans can go where God will not find them and be present with them. Broyles clarifies,

Thoughts of flight need not betray a profound sense of guilt or the fact that the speaker has committed or been accused of a crime. The recognition that we are so scrutinized by another intrinsically makes us want to retreat. We may feel our privacy has been violated or we may fear we will inevitably disappoint the one who takes such an interest in us.¹⁹

The psalmist considers darkness a place to escape God’s presence, which may represent sin, which is a form of disconnection from the light of God’s goodness. VanGemeran explains, “The Lord’s hand will protect God’s child wherever he may be (v. 10), even in ‘darkness’ (vv. 11–12). There is only light with God, and his light brightens

17. Willem VanGemeran, “Psalms” in *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 836.

18. Ibid.

19. Broyles, *Psalms*, 485.

up the darkness so that the psalmist can say affirmatively, ‘The night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you’ (v. 12).”²⁰ Interestingly, even in the psalmist’s attempts to find a place away from God, he realizes how God’s hand is still there protecting, guiding, and blessing. God’s loving “actions evidence divine pursuit and loyalty.”²¹ Just as with God’s personal knowledge of the psalmist, so his presence and pursuit of the psalmist also are beyond human comprehension.

In vv. 13–16, the psalmist explains how God knows him so well. God forms and creates the innermost parts of humans while they are still in their mother’s womb. Hence, God was intricately a part of the psalmist’s creation from the very beginning of life; God created him in a secret place. In these verses, “God is portrayed as a skilled weaver and the speaker as his handiwork. God’s interest in the speaker from his life’s beginning evidences God’s personal and long-term investment in him.”²² The psalmist understands how amazing this creative process was, that God creates humans for a purpose, which is why he gives the psalmist a preordained life span. The psalmist recognizes that humans are fearfully and wonderfully made. The psalmist could look around at the rest of God’s creation and exclaim that God’s works are wonderful.

In vv. 17–18, the psalmist comes to the ultimate realization of the intimate depths of God’s thoughts towards humans. He is aware “of God’s grace toward him and responds with a hymn of thanksgiving (‘I praise you’).”²³ VanGemeran declares that

20. VanGemeran, “Psalms,” 837.

21. Broyles, *Psalms*, 485.

22. Ibid., 486.

23. VanGemeran, “Psalms,” 838.

“Yahweh’s plans are beyond man’s ability to comprehend, as they are more in number than the sand of the sea (vv. 17–18; cf. Gen 22:17; 32:12). They are like a dream; but, unlike a dream, God’s love is real. When awake the psalmist knows that he still enjoys God’s presence (v. 18).”²⁴

The psalmist then shifts his attention from the wonders of God to his enemies. The psalmist wants God to defend him because these enemies are really God’s enemies. Because of this, the psalmist’s speaking about the enemies “is not to clear the speaker’s name before accusers and society but to establish his willingness to live in relationship with God and thus participate in his worship.”²⁵ The psalmist proceeds to ask God to search him again for anything that is not a reflection of God because fear and anxiety do not exist in God. This section of the psalm is not about the wicked who take offense at God’s name. It is about a clear pathway for the psalmist into God’s presence. These wicked people are a distraction between the psalmist and God’s presence, so he asks God to lead the way into everlasting.²⁶ The psalmist’s request that God search him a second time is “a reasoned surrender to God’s inescapable, all-searching presence. Earlier the speaker’s initial response was to escape; now he chooses to draw near to the God who pursues him.”²⁷

God searches the hearts and thoughts of his people and leads them in the right path. Spiritual directors understand that God knows his people better than they know

24. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 838–9.

25. Broyles, *Psalms*, 484.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 487.

themselves because he formed them. With this knowledge, spiritual directors create a space and open the door for God to explore the heart and thoughts of their directees.

John 14:16–24, 15:1–11

Like the psalmist, John had a deep understanding of his relationship with God. He developed his understanding from having a physical relationship with the incarnated Jesus. In his experience of walking alongside, learning from, and ministering with Jesus, John concluded that he was deeply loved by God. In fact, in his Gospel, he calls himself the beloved disciple or the one whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 20).

Unlike the other Gospel writers, John does not give a simple chronological retelling of the life of Jesus. Craig Keener suggests that it is “Jesus’ ‘teaching and self-presentation’ which are most distinctive.”²⁸ There is some belief among commentators that John’s Gospel is more of a “‘spiritual’ gospel, that is, a more theological interpretive one” than the Synoptics.²⁹ John provides a more intimate revelation of Jesus’s personhood and his deep love for humanity (John 3:16–17; 14:1–14). John’s depictions of Jesus’s encounters with ordinary people as they deal with their joys, doubts, pains, wounds, and sufferings demonstrate this love (John 2:1–11; 3:1–21; 4:1–42; 5:1–15; 8:1–11; 9:1–12; 11:17–44). John also provides an understanding of the continuous involvement of the Trinity in the lives of human beings (John 14:15–21, 26; 16:5–15). Through John’s Gospel, God demonstrates what it looks like to be in an intimate relationship with him. God shares his love and his creative activity in the world with the

28. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 53.

29. *Ibid.*, 49.

Trinity and with humanity. In John's view, God sacrifices his Son to the world as an act of love, but he also imparts the Spirit to humanity as an act of love and desire for an intimate relationship. Jesus's death and resurrection signifies God's redemption of humanity. Jesus breathes the Spirit into humanity reminiscent of the divine breath breathed into the first human signifying God's new life and empowerment of humanity. The Spirit continues to provide guidance to believers just as Jesus provided to his disciples.

Jesus is the incarnation of God's intention and will for humanity; he is a representation of the intimate relationship God intended to have with human beings when he created them. By sending Jesus to earth in human form, God offers a way for human beings to move back toward that original intention. A human being's belief in Jesus as his son is the way back to God. In the incarnation, God also provides human beings with an example of what a true, intimate relationship with him looks like.

In John 14–16, Jesus offers his final discourse to his followers before his impending death. In John 14:16–20, Jesus explains the position of those who believe in him. By this point, Jesus has already established God as his Father. So, he tells his followers that he is going to make a request of his Father on their behalf. By specifying that he is going to ask his Father, he is evoking the image of a parent who loves his child and is willing to give his child what he needs. The requests that Jesus is going to make is that his Father sends his followers another Advocate or Helper just like he was to them. While Jesus is present visibly with his followers on earth, "he has been their champion and helper, the one on whose guidance and support they could rely; but now he was about to leave them. He has been with them for a short time, but the 'other paraclete', his alter

ego, would be with them permanently, and not only with them but in them.”³⁰ Curiously, Jesus calls this Helper the Spirit of truth. The Spirit of truth can discern right from wrong, good from evil, but this Spirit is only available to those who have a relationship with Jesus.

Jesus begins to explain how this relationship with the unseen Helper works. There is a unity that exists between the Helper and Jesus’s followers. He will exist within them. The relationship that will exist between the Helper and the followers is intimate. Tied to this intimate, internal relationship with the Helper, Jesus will still be present with them even though he has to go away. Therefore, they will never be alone. He tells them that he is in his Father and his followers are in him. With that statement, he is depicting the union his believers have with the Trinity. This union means that Jesus’s followers are not orphans, but they have a Father and an eternal family in the Trinity. This presence is a continual presence and a divine union that goes beyond human comprehension. It is a mystery that requires faith, and, by faith, those who are his followers will recognize this relationship and want more of it.³¹ Jesus states that the world will not be able to see the Spirit or see him but that his followers will be able to see him. This seeing is not a visual seeing, but a knowing type of seeing, a vision beyond vision. Craig Keener suggests, “The Fourth Gospel often uses the language of knowledge and vision to define those who are in this covenant relationship. Signs can produce some faith, but ultimately John

30. F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 302.

31. *Ibid.*, 303–4.

demands a faith, vision and knowledge that run deeper than any continued dependence on signs, regardless of how faith begins.”³²

Jesus came to earth for humanity to rediscover relationship with God. Human beings are not alone on earth. Jesus, through John, is expressing who God is and what a relationship with God is like. This identity in God is an empowering place from within, a place that can withstand the situations and issues that are presented to them in the world. This is the place that Adam and Eve experienced before their relationship with God was damaged. Jesus promises his followers a way back to this relationship with the Father. The Spirit empowers them to continue his work on earth.

In John 15:1–11, Jesus explains how his followers live in this position of union with him and the Father. He utilizes the imagery of a vine, which is appropriate for his audience because “vineyards and vines were so much a part of ancient Mediterranean life that they presented themselves naturally for comparisons.”³³ In this illustration, Jesus states that he is the vine, and his followers are the branches. “The Father tends the vine with loving care, making it as fruitful as possible: he removes unfruitful branches and prunes those that are fruitful, clearing away superfluous wood so that they may be even more fruitful.”³⁴ Jesus clarifies that his followers have already been cleansed by his words, the message he has been giving them while he was physically present with them. They already exist in a position of redemption; however, in order to continue to live the life that glorifies him and the Father, they must remain connected to the vine, connected

32. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, 234.

33. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 988–9.

34. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 308.

to him. This continuous connection to him is what will allow them, the branches, to bear fruit.

To bear fruit, Jesus's followers will be subjected to pruning as administered by the vinedresser, who is God the Father. Keener asserts, "The state of a tree's fruit . . . was said to attest how well its farmer . . . had cared for it . . . reinforcing the importance of a gardener's care for it."³⁵ This imagery demonstrates how God brings about change or transformation in the lives of his people for them to bear fruit and reflect Jesus. By remaining connected to the vine and being subjected to the pruning of the vinedresser, Jesus's followers can share in God's love and creative activity in the world. They can go to the Father in prayer and make requests, and he will answer them. This connection and pruning also helps them to grow in love of God and other people as well as to grow in trust and obedience to God's word. According to Keener, this vine imagery of remaining connected to Jesus and the Father reflects "a good bit of Johannine thought: new birth, new life, and religion genuinely pleasing to God all must come from above, from the Spirit, from Jesus, who is from above. . . . The best of human effort apart from God's own enablement is worthless."³⁶ F. F. Bruce states, "As the Father is supremely glorified in the obedience of Jesus (John 13:31 f.; 17:1, 4), so he is glorified in those whose lives reproduce the obedient life of Jesus. The 'fruit' of which this parable speaks is, in effect, likeness to Jesus."³⁷ Those who manifest such likeness show conclusively that they are truly disciples of Jesus. In being his disciples, human beings are acting in the image and

35. Keener, *Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 994.

36. Ibid., 998.

37. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 310.

likeness of the God that created them. Jesus states that this process of remaining connected and pruning will allow his followers to experience his joy, a joy that is complete, not missing anything. This is the abundant life that Jesus says he came to bring to his followers in John 10:10.

Spiritual directors understand that their directees will experience suffering as part of their spiritual journeys; however, as long as they remain connected to Jesus in their journeys, the pruning work of God will bear fruit. Spiritual directors understand the spiritual position of their directees, that they already have union with the Trinity. The spiritual journeys that they are on is to uncover and experience more and more of this union. Spiritual directors offer support and encouragement to their directees as they experience the pruning and movement towards unity with the Trinity.

Rom. 12:1–2

The Book of Acts depicts Paul's experience of becoming connected to the vine, Jesus, being pruned by God the Father, and being imparted with the Spirit (Acts 9:1-31). Prior to Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, he was a persecutor and murderer of Jesus's followers. After meeting Jesus and his subsequent conversion, Paul, formerly Saul, "has collapsed the animus against believers in Jesus unto himself. His great reversal pulled back the terrorism he was inflicting on the church."³⁸ Paul began to evangelize and "the church had a moment of peace, but that peace was not everywhere. The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed the benefits of Saul's

38. Willie James Jennings, *Acts, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 98.

transformation.”³⁹ As a result of this experience, Paul testified in his epistles about how he experienced a holistic change in his being and how he was transformed into a follower of Jesus. Because of this new way of being, this new life, Paul lives to reflect Jesus and glorify God. So, Paul passionately seeks to relate his personal experience to other people and encourage them in this process of formation in the image and likeness of Jesus.

In Romans 1–11, Paul discusses how there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile being included in the family of God and with the greater Christian community. As Dunn notes,

The people of God thus redefined, an equivalent rule of life needs to be formulated, the “walk in newness of life” as over against the walk in the ordinances of Israel’s law (6:4), the service in newness of Spirit as over against oldness of letter (7:6), the obedience of faith in accord with the Spirit fulfilling the requirement of the law unconfused with Jewish “works” (8:4).⁴⁰

In the remainder of the epistle, Paul instructs the Romans in how to live according to this new life. Paul opens chapter twelve by instructing the Romans on how they can experience being formed in the image and likeness of Jesus. He starts by pleading with them to make the decision to experience this formation because of how merciful God has been to them already by including them in his family. James D. G. Dunn explains, “Paul’s authority in making the appeal is grounded in and expressive of his own experience and role as agent of God’s mercy (11:13–14, 22, 30–31).”⁴¹

In Rom. 12:1–2, Paul speaks of the whole person, body, soul, mind, and spirit, being formed into the image and likeness of Jesus. In v. 1, Paul suggests that individuals

39. Jennings, *Acts*, 98.

40. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 705.

41. *Ibid.*, 709.

first must present or offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God, which means that they are giving their bodies freely to him. The purpose of this presentation is to make themselves available for God's intentions. Individuals are not being forced or manipulated into this sacrifice; instead, they are making a conscious decision to offer themselves. It is imperative that Paul starts his instruction about formation with the presentation of the body because the body can be the biggest hindrance to this formation process.⁴²

This concept of sacrifice is something that Paul's audience would understand because sacrificial ritual was part of cultic traditions in their world. Dunn asserts, "Ritual is an important part of group identity: in the ancient world, too, cultic and sacrificial ritual regularly served to express national identity and loyalty, and participation in a group's distinctive cultic rituals marked the participant as belonging to the group."⁴³ By Paul establishing that God now has opened his family to Gentiles, this sacrificial ritual of a living sacrifice redefines the people included in God's family.

This sacrifice of the body indicates that individuals are to offer their whole beings to God, as they are "the agent through which their new life in Christ is to express itself."⁴⁴ The living aspect of the sacrifice means,

The sacrifice God looks for is no longer that of beast or bird in temple, but the daily commitment of life lived within the constraints and relationships of this bodily world. The boundary of cultic ritual is transposed from actual cultic

42. D. Edmond Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation: An Exposition of Romans 12:1–2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151, no. 603 (July–September 1994): 319, accessed July 25, 2019, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=22&sid=8bdfcc23-5a25-419c-9e1a-0a4b5d2286aa%40sdc-v-sessmgr02>.

43. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 716.

44. Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation," 314.

practices to the life of every day and transformed into nonritual expression, into the much more demanding work of human relationships in an everyday world.⁴⁵

As such, these living sacrifices were to live “under the impact of that ‘newness of life’ (Rom. 6:4) which the Holy Spirit imparted to them in regeneration. Because of that new life, their bodies, yielded to Christ, are now living sacrifices and are destined to share in the blessed eternal life in the first resurrection (Phil. 3:20–21).”⁴⁶ As with other traditional Jewish sacrifices, these living sacrifices are considered holy and pleasing to God. By making the sacrifice of their bodies, individuals are now holy or set apart from the world surrounding them. God’s response to this sacrifice is pleasure, which is a key factor in Jesus’s followers’ continual presentation of themselves as living sacrifices.⁴⁷ In making this sacrifice, they are glorifying God, which is an act of worship. This act of worship is only fair and reasonable because of all that God has already done for them.

In v. 2, Paul moves from the body to the soul. Dallas Willard defines the soul as an aspect of the individual’s self that interconnects all the other aspects of individuals (body, mind, spirit) “so that they form one life,”⁴⁸ which the soul utilizes to reach “ever deeper into the person’s vast environment of God and his creation.”⁴⁹ Willard further states that the soul “is a term that refers to the whole person”⁵⁰ and suggests that “the soul encompasses and ‘organizes’ the whole person.”⁵¹ Besides the body, the soul is the next

45. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 717.

46. Hiebert, “Presentation and Transformation,” 316.

47. *Ibid.*, 316–17.

48. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 37.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

aspect of a person that is visible or present to other human beings. A person's soul is sometimes considered who the person actually is. The body and the soul together make up part of the image that individuals' present to the world.

Paul states that individuals should not be conformed to the image or pattern of the world (Rom. 12:2). In the beginning, God created human beings in his image, but as a result of Adam and Eve's distrust and disobedience, their intimate relationship with God was tainted. This tainted relationship had an adverse effect on God's original intention of their image being conformed to his; their image became distorted. As a result, individuals seek to fix this image by conforming to the image that the world offers. Paul's personal experiences demonstrated to him just how powerful an influence the world could be in forming the "patterns of individual behavior."⁵² This conforming implies "a conformity that is external and does not truly represent the believer's inner life"⁵³ and "denotes a pattern of life that does not come from within but is imposed from without."⁵⁴ This conforming further taints the relationship between individuals and God because it hinders or blocks the inner life where formation takes place. This image is related to the individual's soul, which is the individual's connecting point between all that they are—all the dimensions of being and the world.

Paul further states that individuals can experience transformation by allowing their minds to experience renewal, but he does not explain how this mind renewal will take place. In this verse, the Greek word for "transformed" is also used to indicate "the

52. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 712.

53. Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation," 319–20.

54. Ibid.

transfigured body of Christ (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2).”⁵⁵ Paul’s implication by utilizing this word is that it is the power of God that does the mind renewal, which is not a trivial, momentary action. D. Edmond Hiebert explains that this mind renewal is “a vital change revealing a new life. The present passive verb notes that this transformation is not a change produced by one’s own efforts; it is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit”⁵⁶ and this “transformation is progressively realized, not a single crisis experience.”⁵⁷ Hiebert further suggests that the apex of this mind renewal deals with “the center of consciousness, a renewal that eventually makes the whole life new. The word ‘mind’ denotes, generally speaking, the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, and those of feeling, judging, and determining.”⁵⁸ In order not to be conformed to this present age, individuals have to develop a mindset or a pattern of thinking that is influenced by the Spirit and is obedient to God’s words. The more individuals are renewed and transformed in their consciousnesses, the more they are able to reveal themselves as formed in the image of God. With a transformation of their consciousnesses, individuals become reflections of Jesus, which is increasingly expressed through their bodies with their words, choices, and actions.

Paul concludes v. 2 by declaring the outcome of this formation process.

Individuals will be able to test and prove God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will. Willard states, “Volition, or choice, is the exercise of will, the capacity of the person to originate

55. Hiebert, “Presentation and Transformation,” 321.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

things and events that would not otherwise be or occur.”⁵⁹ God’s will is where his plans and purposes originate prior to his words or actions. His will is a manifestation of his character and nature.⁶⁰ The testing and proving of God’s will involves the aspect of individuals that resembles this aspect of God—the will. Willard suggests that the terms “will,” “spirit,” and “heart” are interchangeable when it comes to discussing this “self-initiating and self-sustaining”⁶¹ core of one’s being. This will/spirit/heart relates to the character and nature of the person. Consequently, this will/spirit/heart reflects the likeness of God that he intended to be inherent in human beings when they were created.

The outcome of the formation process is that the will/spirit/heart of individuals will reflect God’s will for their lives. The ability to test and prove God’s will is the growth of a discernment exemplified by this new life. This is how they are to live in the world now because of being formed in the image and likeness of God. This is a daily process. This is the perfect completion or end of God’s original intention for his creation. God’s will for them lacks nothing; it is good and pleasing. Subsequently, these individuals now live in a continuous and growing trust and obedience to God’s word and will for their lives. Hiebert affirms, “As a committed believer faithfully follows the leading of the Holy Spirit in the outworking of God’s will for him individually, he comes to the devout realization that the unfolding of the divine will in relation to his life and to his ministry for the Lord is indeed ‘good, pleasing, and perfect.’”⁶²

59. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 33.

60. Hiebert, “Presentation and Transformation,” 323.

61. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 34.

62. Hiebert, “Presentation and Transformation,” 323.

Spiritual directors understand the part that directees play in their spiritual journeys. Although God is doing the work of the formation, the directees must make themselves available for the work to take place. Directees must be intentional in the development of relationship with God. This intentionality involves them submitting their lives or their whole selves to God and allowing God to do the work of formation. Directors assist directees in this process of submission by advising them of spiritual practices in which they can engage as well as by informing them of areas where they may be blind to their lack of submission.

Eph. 2:10

The Apostle Paul, because of his transformation of self-experience, understands that his life is not his own creation. His life is God's handiwork, God's work of art. In Eph. 2:10, he tells fellow believers that they are God's masterpiece. The word translated as "masterpiece" or "workmanship" in this verse is the Greek word *poiema*, which means "that which has been made or is the result of someone's work."⁶³ The English word "poem" is derived from this Greek word, so "in a very real sense the redeemed person is God's poetry."⁶⁴ This word is also found in Rom. 1:20. Both instances signify "God's creative activity."⁶⁵ Paul's use of this word "refers to the spiritual creation resulting from the regenerative work of God in human life."⁶⁶

63. Edmond D. Hiebert, "God's Creative Masterpiece," *Direction* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 117, accessed July 25, 2019, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=25&sid=fe83b780-091e-4af7-b1d8-73d5cf499ce0%40pdc-v-sessmgr01>.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

Paul declares that, as God's masterpieces, God created believers in Christ Jesus for his purposes. The spiritual life begins at conversion, which is when God transforms believers and also "imparts to them a new nature."⁶⁷ God's "new creation 'in Christ Jesus' is brought into being by the agency of the Spirit, and by the Spirit's agency the promise of the new covenant is realized when men and women are found 'doing the will of God from the heart' (Eph. 6:6)."⁶⁸

Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland state, "In saving people, God performs an act of creation (cf. 4:24—'created to be like God'). In other words, Christians are God's projects or, better to say, 'works in process,' and, as he works in them, they can do deeds that Paul describes as 'good.'"⁶⁹ The good works in which believers engage are not a product of their efforts; rather, they are in cooperation with Christ Jesus—their good works are the result of God's plans. God's transformation of individuals is a transformation that takes place on the inside in order that they "accomplish good works, with the result that they walk, i.e., live, in them. God arranged ahead of time . . . how it would work, and then he implemented his plan."⁷⁰ This fact implies that God is constantly at work in the lives of his people.

God laid out in advance the good works that he wants his people to accomplish. As a result, they do not have to strive for good works, they just have to walk in them.

67. Hiebert, "God's Creative Masterpiece," 117.

68. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 291.

69. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, eds., *Ephesians–Philemon*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 12, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 70.

70. Ibid., 71.

Spiritual directors view their directees as God's masterpieces. They understand that everything that directees have experienced in their spiritual journeys reveals part of the story God is creating out of their lives. In Hiebert's words, "More marvelous is the beauty of a transformed individual soul set into harmony with the eternal God through redeeming grace. It is truly God's poem, the acme of His creative work!"⁷¹

Historical Foundations

The spiritual director was raised Catholic, and her entire family is made up of staunch Catholics going back several generations. In fact, practically everyone in her small, rural hometown in southwest Louisiana is Catholic. She did not discover Protestants until she left home and went to college. She was intrigued by the heavy emphasis on the study of Scripture and felt this type of Bible knowledge was missing from her Christian experience. After marriage, she chose to attend a non-denominational Protestant church and has been participating in these types of churches ever since. She chose non-denominational type churches because she could never fully relinquish her Catholic upbringing. As such, the individuals she was drawn to in her study of spiritual direction were Catholics. These wisdom teachers filled the void of mystery and mysticism that she missed from her Catholic heritage. These teachers demonstrated an ability to seek and find God from within themselves and in their everyday lives rather than simply from Scripture study.

The following is an examination of several prominent historical figures who had an influence on shaping the Christian understanding of spirituality and transformation. These individuals experienced similar formative years. The world around them was

71. Hiebert, "God's Creative Masterpiece," 117.

chaotic and unstable, and their countries were being torn apart by foreign invasions and wars. They had a lack of faith in leadership, even in the leadership of the Church. These individuals felt that they needed a way to seek God for themselves, a way that was outside the formality of the Church. In various ways, they embarked on a journey of self-discovery which led them to contemplative lifestyles. To do this, they spent time away from society, in silence, solitude, and prayer, which changed them internally. They discovered who they truly were, the individuals God created them to be. Their discoveries about their true selves led them to a deeper relationship with and understanding of God. They developed methodologies that helped them maintain their contemplative lifestyles, and they shared these methodologies with others. In essence, their life experiences led them to contemplation, which in turn led them to becoming spiritual directors for other people.

Desert Fathers and Mothers

The historical precedent for this process of formation into the image and likeness of God, or what henceforth will be called the spiritual formation journey, is the example set by the individuals known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. These individuals lived during a time when the Christian Church had become the recognized religion of the known world. Once Christianity became the state religion, it became a reflection of Roman culture. Power and privilege were the new hallmarks of Christianity; consequently, corruption seeped into the Church, and Christians became more secularized. As such, the Desert Fathers and Mothers realized that the discipleship of the Church had been compromised because of its new position of privilege and power. The

Church had been usurped by the culture, or as Paul would suggest, the Church had become conformed to the image of the world.

To regain what they felt was lost by the Church's privileged status, these individuals escaped to the desert. To reconnect with their source, the Desert Fathers and Mothers decided to leave this privileged status to willingly put themselves in a position of scarcity, sacrifice, discomfort, and danger. These individuals "were determined to keep themselves open and receptive to the transformational work of grace in their life rather than give in to the allures and deceptions of a powerful state that co-opted Christianity."⁷² Gerald Sittser contends, "The desert saints believed that the desert itself is a fitting place to engage in this struggle, for it forces us to face our weaknesses squarely, strips away illusion and pretension, and enables us to recognize our absolute need for God."⁷³

The stark environment for the desert fathers and mothers became a spiritual formation experience. In the solitude of the desert, they were able to detach from the influences of the culture and whittle away at those worldly attachments and ways of being. They were able to break free from the cultural illusions of power and success. They were able to face their human weaknesses and the darkness of their egos. They struggled and suffered with the goal of becoming more like Christ. In addition, the desert allowed them to engage in a deeper level of prayer where they were able to recognize their total dependence on God and allow him to work on their internal transformation. In solitude, "man takes responsibility for fostering his own inner life and his ability to hear

72. Phileena Heuertz, *Mindful Silence: The Heart of Christian Contemplation* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 20.

73. Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 81.

that Word of God when it is spoken. The solitary faces the full mystery of this inner life, in the presence of the invisible God.”⁷⁴

The Desert Fathers and Mothers sought freedom in the solitude, silence, and stillness of the desert. In solitude, they were able to remove themselves from the entanglements and distractions of the world. In solitude, they wrestled with their false self and watched it die. Solitude developed in them a higher level of compassion and love for their neighbor.⁷⁵ In silence, the chains of a compromised Christianity were broken, and they were able to release themselves to the mysteries of God’s will. In silence, they learned to listen to God from their center. In silence, they learned to speak from God rather than from themselves.⁷⁶ It can be deduced from their sayings and the writings of their followers that they spoke and taught with a high level of humility and wisdom. In stillness, they developed the ability to dwell in the presence of God. They were able to survive, sustained not by the material world but rather by their source. Their lives became continuously in communion with God; they learned to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17, NASB).

The result of this fleeing for them was a deepening of their spiritual experience, which over time came to be labeled “mysticism.” In modern terms, this mysticism is called contemplative spirituality. Prior to the legalization of Christianity, contemplation was a regular way of life for Christians. One can assume that the Desert Fathers and Mothers did not escape to the desert with the explicit understanding of the power inherent

74. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries*, 82.

75. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 34.

76. *Ibid.*, 57–8.

in contemplation. They probably only considered the desert to be a place where they could practice their faith unencumbered. They sought to radically return to the original foundation of Christianity, which is to be followers of Christ. Phileena Heuertz states, “Contemplative spirituality . . . is quite simply a way to practice faith. Practicing faith means we clear space within us to encounter divine love so that we might be freed and changed. A truly liberated and transformed person naturally liberates and transforms the world.”⁷⁷ Subversively, they would transform the world by disconnecting from the world.

This deepening produced a spiritual wisdom in them that others desired. They are considered the first spiritual directors because they offered spiritual guidance to others who sought them for instruction. One example is the story of St. Anthony as recalled by St. Athanasius, “When he emerged from his solitude, people recognized in him the qualities of an authentic ‘healthy’ man, whole in body, mind, and soul. They flocked to him for healing, comfort, and direction.”⁷⁸ It is also suggested that St. Anthony had “become so Christlike, so radiant with God’s love, that his entire being was ministry.”⁷⁹

From the acts of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, spiritual directors gain the understanding of how important solitude, silence, and stillness are to the spiritual formation journey. The Desert Fathers and Mothers demonstrate to directors the power inherent in contemplative spirituality to help their directees move toward a more intimate relationship with God. Directors also understand how essential contemplative spirituality is to individuals being formed in the image and likeness of Jesus. With this

77. Heuertz, *Mindful Silence*, 21.

78. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 19–20.

79. *Ibid.*, 32.

understanding, directors will encourage their directees to include moments of solitude, silence, and stillness into their daily lives.

Benedict of Nursia

Benedict was born to a wealthy family of significant status in the year 480 in the Umbrian province of Nursia. His birth occurred seventy years after the fall of Rome, which was a traumatizing event to those areas that were a part of the Roman Empire. After the collapse, the region suffered from invasions by barbarian tribes. These catastrophic events also had an impact on the Church. The world into which Benedict was born was one of chaos and insecurity.

Benedict's life is documented in a quasi-biographical work written by Gregory the Great entitled the *Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great*. The work was written about fifty years after Benedict's death. According to the work, Benedict spent some time in Rome studying liberal arts, after which he left his studies and spent two years in Affile. Eventually, something led Benedict to leave metropolitan life completely as he escaped to the mountains of Subiaco where he lived alone for three years in a cave.⁸⁰ One can theorize that Benedict had a similar experience to his predecessors, the Desert Fathers and Mothers. The things he witnessed in societal life had affected him to the point of seeking seclusion and solitude. As with the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the cave experience of solitude and silence had a profound impact on Benedict, transforming him into a man of wisdom and total devotion to God. Similar to the Desert Fathers and Mothers, a great number of individuals sought out Benedict for his wisdom; he was

80. Esther De Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 15–16.

viewed as a holy man. The numbers were so great that Benedict initially formed twelve small monasteries around Subiaco. Eventually, unlike his predecessors, Benedict left the cave and banded together a group of his monks and formed a monastery at Monte Cassino where he resided until he died in March 547.⁸¹

Although Gregory the Great provides information about Benedict's life and his spiritual journey, ultimately, individuals can learn much more about Benedict from the simple text of about 9,000 words he wrote called, "The Rule of Benedict" (hereafter, The Rule). In the *Dialogues*, Gregory states, "If anyone would like to get the true picture of this man of God, let him go to the Rule he has written, for the holy man could not have taught anything but what he had first lived."⁸² In creating The Rule, Benedict utilizes monastic traditions available at his time, but he gives The Rule a unique flair that is filtered through his personal experiences and the wisdom he gained from those experiences.⁸³ Benedict's wisdom is reflected in his views of the individual, the individual's life with God, and the individual's life with others. Over time, The Rule surpassed other monastic traditions and became the standard for Western monasticism.

Contrary to what its name implies, The Rule is not a book of rules. The word "rule" translated in Latin is the word "*regula*." This word

in the ancient sense meant 'guidepost' or 'railing,' something to hang on to in the dark, something that points out the road, something that gives us support as we climb. The Rule of Benedict, in other words, is more wisdom than law. The Rule of Benedict is not a list of directives. The Rule of Benedict is a way of life. And that's the key to understanding the Rule. It isn't one.⁸⁴

81. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 16.

82. Ibid., 25.

83. Ibid., 17–18.

84. Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 7.

As a layperson, Benedict wrote *The Rule* with the intention of it being a guide for anyone willing to follow it. He opens the Prologue with an invitation to whoever is willing to listen to his “instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”⁸⁵ Benedict crafted *The Rule* “for ordinary people who live ordinary lives.”⁸⁶ Benedict advocates for the uniqueness of individuals, which requires an acknowledgement of differences among the individuals of the community. To live community life well together, individuals need to accept both their uniqueness and the uniqueness of others. Individuals’ unique qualities are not to be ignored or abolished but embraced by the community.⁸⁷ Embracing the uniqueness of individuals in the community results in a communal life that is less hierarchical, which creates the opportunity for the members of the community to participate in decision-making. Everyone in the group has their needs met and everyone in the group serves others. Esther De Waal explains that *The Rule* offers “the sense that men and women need to love and be loved if they are to become fully human; that they need a place in which to belong, and that not merely in a geographical sense; that they need freedom and yet must accept authority.”⁸⁸ She further states, “The way of St. Benedict simply makes space for the individual seeking God to find him in his or her own way.”⁸⁹

85. Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed (New York: Crossroad, 2010), 3, Kindle.

86. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 4.

87. *Ibid.*, 111.

88. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 29.

89. *Ibid.*, 117.

Although Benedict strives for a community of connected individuals, he does not promote conformity. Life in community “is a very human thing. We do not expect perfection here, but we do expect growth, in ourselves as well as in others.”⁹⁰ This growth occurs as individuals discover more about themselves through their daily interactions with others as they work through issues and receive care and guidance from others. Community allows individuals to “work out our connectedness to God, to one another, and to ourselves. It is in community where we find out who we really are.”⁹¹ In community, individuals also have the opportunity to develop their unique gifts and calling.

Benedict intends for *The Rule* to be a guide for individuals to live their lives conscious of God’s continual presence. This consciousness allows individuals to view their world as a good place, a place where they are important, and a place where they can live peacefully with others. For monks experiencing the brutality of their age, this view of the world was a radical concept. To achieve this understanding of God’s continual presence, Benedict attests to the sacredness of all of God’s creation. He recognizes God’s presence everywhere, always. He affirms his message by pointing to the Gospels and the Scriptures. In *The Rule*, Benedict challenges his readers directly with the claims of the Gospel. His goal is for his readers to live according to the demands of the Word.⁹² Benedict does not consider God to be an “idea nor ideal; he is exceedingly concrete reality, and it is only in the concrete reality of my daily living that I am going to

90. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 46.

91. *Ibid.*, 48.

92. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 32.

encounter him.”⁹³ This concrete reality is to be lived and experienced through the practical and mundane activities of the daily life. Benedict does not divide life into the sacred and the secular. Everything is sacred, even the most menial tasks. This concrete reality is “a practical reality rooted in the Incarnation.”⁹⁴

The Rule contains seventy-three chapters that cover every aspect of individuals’ daily life from worship to work to leisure. This daily practice offers guidance “in imposing the order and structure on the circumstances of their ordinary and daily lives that will give them a way to find God.”⁹⁵ The Rule does not require individuals to perform any great deeds of ascetism or poverty to seek God. Instead, it provides them with the wisdom of how they can make themselves open to seeing God and his work in their world. Joan Chittister declares that The Rule “is wisdom distilled from the daily.”⁹⁶

The Rule offers individuals the opportunity to structure their daily lives in a manner that allows for the whole person to be engaged in living conscious of God’s continual presence. De Waal asserts that “St. Benedict insisted that since body, mind and spirit together make up the whole person the daily patterns of life in the monastery should involve time for prayer, time for study and time for manual work. All three should command respect and three should equally become a way to God.”⁹⁷ She further states that this way of life means “acceptance of the totality of each man and woman as a whole person involving body, mind, and spirit, each part worthy of respect, each part calling for

93. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 104.

94. Ibid., 94.

95. Ibid., 11.

96. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 4.

97. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 86.

due attention.”⁹⁸ The Rule’s guidance offers a rhythm to individuals’ day as they “are essentially rhythmic creatures, and that life needs this rhythm and balance if it is to be consistently good and not drain from us the precious possibility of being or becoming whole selves.”⁹⁹ This structure provides balance for the whole person, which enhances individuals’ lives as well as the functioning of the community. The Rule creates “the favorable environment in which the balanced life may flourish.”¹⁰⁰ The daily practices that The Rule offers ensure that individuals “make time for every facet of life. They live a rhythm of life that includes the natural, the spiritual, the social, the productive, the physical, and the personal. . . . They live life well. They are, in fact, fully alive.”¹⁰¹ De Waal suggests, “The Benedictine life can lead to personal integration and ultimately to the transformation of the whole person in Christ.”¹⁰²

This balance of daily practices requires moderation. Individuals should not put primary focus on one aspect of their daily practices to the detriment of others. Balance also involves *statio*. The Rule’s concept of *statio* requires that one activity be completely stopped before another activity can begin. Finally, balance necessitates an understanding of stewardship. Everything belongs to God and individuals have the responsibility of being consciously aware of taking great care of their “trusteeship,” which is “the responsible holding in trust of something only temporarily loaned to us for its good

98. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 87.

99. Ibid., 93.

100. Ibid., 86.

101. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 77.

102. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 89.

usage, and for which we remain accountable to Christ, the one and only master of all goods, property, possessions and talents.”¹⁰³

This balance leads to peace, which allows individuals to face life’s circumstances with surety of God’s goodness and faithfulness. Chittister says this peace “is the sign of the disarmed heart.”¹⁰⁴ She suggests that “Benedict wants monastics to be at peace with what has been given, at peace with what they are asked to do, at peace with those who guide them, at peace with one another, and at peace with themselves.”¹⁰⁵

The Rule is not easy; it requires commitment. Three vows uphold individuals’ commitment to The Rule, the first of which is the vow of stability. Stability calls for perseverance and patience. It is the act of staying in a particular space even when things get difficult or even when seemingly better opportunities arise. Stability centers “us in something greater than ourselves so that nothing lesser than ourselves can possibly sweep us away. Stability says that where I am is where God is for me.”¹⁰⁶ The second vow is obedience, which is derived “from the word *obaudiens*,” meaning

to listen intently, to listen to the voice of God, to hear God’s voice and follow it—so that we are led along the path of God’s will rather than our own. This means that the point of reference in my life will always be the presence of God, to whom I listen and respond with a yes that comes not from fear but from that love which St. Benedict presents to us as the mark, above all, of the Christian.¹⁰⁷

The third vow is *conversatio morum*, which signifies individuals’ commitment to conversion. This vow centers on detachment, meaning that individuals are “to cling to

103. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 101.

104. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 185.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., 150–1.

107. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 13.

nothing, to hold everything—even the best of holy things—with a relaxed grasp.”¹⁰⁸ This vow calls individuals to be open to change, to expect change, which allows them to let go of the old or of things that no longer serve their growth. Thomas Merton suggested that this ““most mysterious of our vows, which is actually the most essential. . . can be interpreted as a commitment to total inner transformation of one sort or another—a commitment to become a completely new man.””¹⁰⁹

Listening and silence are foundational tools for individuals to be able to maintain these vows. Listening has such significance that Benedict starts the Prologue by telling his readers to listen. At its core, listening involves listening to God, which occurs through the Word, through others, through the world around them, and through their personal lives. To listen well, individuals should engage in silence daily. Benedict dedicates a chapter of *The Rule* to silence as well as other mentions of the practice throughout. For Benedict, silence “is about much more than not speaking. He is as concerned about the cessation of the inner noise as of the external chatter.”¹¹⁰

Prayer is central to *The Rule*, as it sustains individuals as they engage in the way of life that *The Rule* outlines. Benedict teaches that prayer is more than petitioning God. He sees prayer as “putting on of the mind of Christ so that we learn to see the world as God sees it.”¹¹¹ This type of prayer is contemplative prayer.¹¹² During the day, Benedict

108. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 163.

109. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, Naomi Burton, Patrick Hart, and Amiya Chakravarty, eds. (New York: New Directions, 1975), 337.

110. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 146.

111. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 196.

112. *Ibid.*, 35.

set aside regular times for prayer, the seven daily offices of The Rule. Accordingly, at these regular intervals, individuals are to stop whatever they are doing to pray. This prayer regimen helps them maintain their primary focus on God as well allows them to engage in continuous prayer. This contemplative, continuous prayer assumes that “Christ is to be found in the circumstances, the people, the things of daily life. St. Benedict hopes that, if we are continually aware of this, we shall lift our hearts to him and in this way our whole life will become prayer in action.”¹¹³ This prayer is “not merely confined to the mind but engages the whole being, will, emotions, senses, body, intelligence, all that goes to make up each of us as we are, separately and individually.”¹¹⁴

Benedict also instructed monks on a specific form of prayer called *lectio Divina*, which involves a meditative and reflective reading of Scripture. This “daily reading of Scripture, *lectio*, is the monastic practice designed to remind us always of who we are and what we have yet to grow into in this particular moment in life if we, too, are to be bearers of the Word.”¹¹⁵

An increase in individuals’ humility and love are Benedict’s desired outcomes of living the way of life The Rule prescribes. He devotes the entirety of chapter seven to the topic of humility. He advances the vision of individuals climbing a ladder as a representation of individuals’ growth in humility. The climb is a lateral climb suggesting that growth in humility is a progressive process. This lifetime work of growth in humility “involves the integration of both body and soul. ‘Our body and our soul are the two sides

113. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 153.

114. Ibid.

115. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 178.

of this ladder' (RB 7:9), he teaches."¹¹⁶ This process begins with individuals' interior transformation, which leads to change in their external behaviors. The top of the ladder signifies a freedom and peace when in humility individuals surrender total control of their lives to God.¹¹⁷

For Benedict, "Humility, the Rule implies, is the glue of our relationships."¹¹⁸ According to De Waal, "The novice begins with the process of stripping himself, or letting himself be stripped of the empirical self, so that the real self may emerge in the common life of the community, which is the school of love. In this school of love three dimensions of love grow together, love of self, love of the brethren, love of God."¹¹⁹ The Rule could "be called a handbook on the practice of loving. That living out of love in its most practical terms, which we struggle with every day, hinges on our love of Christ, the keystone of it all."¹²⁰ This love is based in the "daily, ordinary practice of loving with which the Rule is underlined. To see the face of Christ in all those whom we meet day in day out is never easy. It often asks from us patience, imagination, good humor."¹²¹ Love, like humility, requires work and sacrifice.

The Rule contains the wisdom Benedict gained from his personal experiences in seeking God, reflecting his journey of transformation of self. The Rule is a valuable tool for spiritual direction as it serves as a guidebook for individuals on how to cultivate a

116. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 56.

117. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 47.

118. Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled*, 55.

119. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 118–19.

120. *Ibid.*, 145.

121. *Ibid.*, 119.

way of life that focuses on God's presence. This way of life involves realizing that God's presence is everywhere and that all of creation is sacred. It involves consistent, contemplative prayer that encompasses the whole person, body, soul, mind, and spirit. By actively participating in The Rule, individuals can craft a life that is open to God's transformative work. This practice involves individuals engaging in silence and intentionally listening to God. The results of opening their lives to God in this manner are an increase in peace, humility, and love.

Ignatius of Loyola

In the sixteenth century, Ignatius had an experience of change and formation that led him to a new life as a devoted follower of Jesus. Like the Desert Fathers and Mothers, his experience transpired because of being away from the rigors of society for a period. Unlike the Desert Fathers and Mothers, he did not choose his separation, but rather his separation and confinement were a result of being injured after a military battle. Ignatius was sent to convalesce at his family residence in Loyola, during which he had a lot of time to reflect on his life up to that point which had not been accomplished or inspiring. During his reflection, he began to take "special notice of the movements in his own spirit."¹²² He observed that these movements were initiated by God as a form of communication. God would speak to him internally through movements and externally in the daily events of his life. This ability to observe and notice "became a cornerstone of his approach to the spiritual life."¹²³

122. David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), loc 82, Kindle.

123. *Ibid.*, Kindle.

In addition to his personal observations about himself, Ignatius also tried to fill the boredom of his convalescing by reading voraciously. Unfortunately, he did not have access to the popular romance novels he wanted to read. The only books available in his home were books about Jesus and some saints, which he found to be inspirational. He was influenced deeply by some spiritual classics, including *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and Garcia de Cisneros's *Compendio*, both of which contained a mixture of spiritual writings important in the Western Christian tradition.¹²⁴ By becoming acquainted with their lives and the interior and exterior movements of God in their lives, Ignatius developed a new image of God. He recognized God as Love personified, describing him as “an intensely personal, active, generous God, a God as Love loving.”¹²⁵

God's present and active love became Ignatius's “foundational image of God. He arrived at it by ‘noting’ how God dealt with him in his body, soul, and spirit, and through the people and events in his everyday life.”¹²⁶ This new view of God changed the way he then approached life, realizing that individuals' views of God essentially influenced their perception of the God they worshipped. He realized that his choices and actions reflected his beliefs about God—he had a paradigm shift. When Ignatius became aware of how generous God's love is towards his creation, he understood that his choices and actions should be just as generous. For him, this shared generosity was a pathway to an intimate

124. Karel S. San Juan, “The Formation of Humility Today: Lessons from the Rule of St. Benedict and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,” *Landas* 27, no. 2 (2013): 147–8, accessed July 25, 2019, <http://web.b.ebsco host.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=55 &sid=5fdb5f3b-f710-440d-b957-6b670e374a24%40pdc-v-sessmgr06>.

125. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* loc 88, Kindle.

126. *Ibid.*, loc 90–2, Kindle.

relationship with God.¹²⁷ To capture his experience, he began writing a manual he called “The Spiritual Exercises.”

Once his time of confinement ended, Ignatius embarked on a personal journey of further developing his intimate relationship with God. This journey was one of exploration and observation. He read the Bible and spiritual classics and he traveled extensively. He devoted himself to God, and this devotion drew followers. He was able to finalize his Spiritual Exercises during his journey. He and his followers traveled around Europe, teaching about Christianity and instructing followers in Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises. Their journey put them in contact with numerous people from various positions in society, including kings and popes.

Among his followers, Ignatius founded the Jesuits. Whereas Benedict developed the Rule for his monks to establish order in their lives and within the walls of the monastery, Ignatius wanted his followers to go out and participate in the world. Out of this vision for his followers, the Jesuits developed what they referred to as the “way of proceeding” which is not a tenet, but instead an approach to life or a belief system consisting of their mindsets, values, and practices. The basis of Ignatian spirituality “is a spiritual ‘way of proceeding’ that offers a vision of life, an understanding of God, a reflective approach to living, a contemplative form of praying, a reverential attitude to our world, and an expectation of finding God daily.”¹²⁸

The Spiritual Exercises contain Ignatius’s “vision in three interrelated exercises: The Principle and Foundation, the Call of the King, and the Contemplation on the Love

127. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* loc 93–9, Kindle.

128. *Ibid.*, loc 21–2, Kindle.

of God. His vision takes in how we see our world, how we see our life, and how we are to grow in our relationship with God.”¹²⁹ This three-part vision helps individuals move toward an intimate relationship with God, covering all aspects of engagement with God and the rest of creation, including life, work, and love.

The first exercise is called the Principle and Foundation and concerns his view of God’s creation. Out of love, God created the heavens and the earth and all it contains. He created humans in his image and likeness and breathed life into them. As such, he is present continuously among his creation. God’s creation and his presence are gifts that God offers to humanity. These gifts denote his generosity to creation, to which individuals respond by being generous to others with these gifts. In the generous use of God’s gifts, people share in his love and creative nature. In response to God’s generous love, human beings worship him with their words and their actions. Because of the tainted relationship that exists between human beings and God, sometimes these gifts become idols and a hinderance to his original intention for them. God’s intention for his gifts is to move individuals closer to him; however, if they become idols, they can move individuals further away from him.

The second part of the exercise is the Call of the King, focusing on Ignatius’s vision of work, which includes human response to God’s generous gifts. Ignatius envisions Jesus as Christ the King, in reverence to whom individuals are to follow his lead, his word, and his instructions. Christ the King invites everyone personally to participate in his work. Individuals are to listen for the call and respond by sacrificially offering themselves to the service of the King.

129. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* loc 35, Kindle.

The final exercise is called Contemplation on the Love of God. In all that God has given to human beings to demonstrate his love for them, his ultimate gift was the gift of himself, the gift of his Son. This precious gift was a demonstration of God's love in action, sharing what was most important to him. God's love holds back nothing and shares everything with the objects of his love. Individuals respond to God's love by their actions and by sharing in his creative activity in the world. This response means that they follow God, which "means that we adopt a kind of active passivity toward the action of God. 'Active passivity' captures the characteristic tone of Ignatian spirituality. It is a spirituality of attentiveness, of watching and waiting, of noticing the ebb and flow of our feelings and inner dispositions."¹³⁰ This response is of trust and obedience to love; it is a response of the heart, not the intellect. This heart response is a return to the intimate connection humans originally had with God. Jesus models this response by holding nothing back from his followers, including giving his life as an act of love. In fact, "The core theme of Ignatian spirituality is Jesus is all heart."¹³¹ Jesus gave all of himself for his followers—body, soul, and spirit—to which human response is an equivalent to a whole person's response of love.

Ignatius developed the Spiritual Exercises out of a desire for individuals to strengthen their relationships with God, not to gain more information or knowledge about him. Ignatius's goal for these exercises was for individual hearts to be turned toward God. His definition of heart was like Willard's definition in that it represented the core of

130. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* loc 285–7, Kindle.

131. *Ibid.*, loc 694, Kindle.

one's being, the spirit and will.¹³² Ignatius's goal was for others to experience the same heart transformation that he had experienced over the course of his spiritual journey.

Ignatius wrote his Spiritual Exercises manual with the intention of others engaging in the exercises. The Exercises are organized in a weekly retreat format, within which guidance for spiritual directors and participants is offered. These exercises offer spiritual direction by providing methods of reflection on one's personal life and on spiritual matters. Ignatius's intention was for others to gain awareness of the interior and exterior movements of God in their lives and for them to experience God's presence in their daily lives. His hope is that the daily awareness of God would prompt individual responses to following God's instructions. After all of his personal experiences with learning to communicate with God for himself and directing others in hearing God's voice, Ignatius was able to develop methods for others to learn to communicate with God. These prayer methods are included in his Spiritual Exercises.

One of Ignatius's primary prayer contributions is the Examen of Consciousness or the Prayer of Examen (the Examen). Because of its significance to Ignatius's spirituality, he introduces the Examen at the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises. The Examen is connected to Ignatius's concept of the heart being the core of the individual's being. The heart is the place of the individual's will and decision-making. For Ignatius, the heart is where discernment takes place. The "heart will tell us which decisions will bring us closer to Jesus and which will take us away from him. Ignatian discernment, then, holds that our Christian choices are often beyond the merely rational or reasonable."¹³³

132. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* loc 1226, Kindle.

133. *Ibid.*, loc 611, Kindle.

Spiritual directors can teach their directees how to use the Prayer of Examen daily so that they can be aware of God's presence as well as learn to discern God's will for their lives. In fact, the Examen utilizes individual feelings in this discernment process. The two terms Ignatius uses to describe how feelings work in this discernment process are "spiritual consolation" and "spiritual desolation." Spiritual consolations are feelings that are encouraging and cause individuals to grow in feelings of love towards God and creation. Spiritual desolations are feelings of inner disturbance or agitation. Consolation and desolation can help individuals listen to the direction God wants them to go in spiritual development.

Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, especially the Examen of Consciousness, are resources individuals can utilize to develop a way of listening to God. Spiritual directors realize the importance of individuals being able to hear from God and being able to be attentive to his active presence in their lives. Directors encourage their directees in developing their practice of the Examen to grow in their recognition of God's movement in their lives.

Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton was born in 1915 in Prades, France, during the midst of World War I. Merton's parents were self-proclaimed artists who did not have much money or stability. The following year, his parents moved to the U.S. to escape war-torn Europe. His mother died from cancer a few years later, which led to an increase in the chaos and instability in his life. His father was unsettled and spent the rest of his life traveling to various countries pursuing his dream of being an artist. At times, he would take Merton with him when he traveled, causing disruptions in his home and school life. He spent

some of his youth in the care of his maternal grandparents in the U.S. while his father was out of the country. As a teenager, he left his younger brother in the care of his grandparents and moved to Europe to be near his father and to attend school. While in Europe, he had the opportunity to explore various countries and meet people from different backgrounds and cultures. When he was not in school or traveling, he lived with an aunt and uncle. Unfortunately, while he was still a teenager, his father died of a brain tumor. He stayed in Europe, eventually attending college at Cambridge in England. He later moved back to the U.S. to attend Columbia University in New York, decided to pursue a career in academia, and eventually became an English professor.¹³⁴

During his young adult years, Merton lived an unbalanced life of overindulgence in the vices of society. He managed to maintain his grades, but he often found himself in compromising situations, including the possibility of fathering an illegitimate child.¹³⁵ The losses and upheaval he experienced as a child left him unsettled as an adult. He seemed to be constantly moving around in search of a place of stability, a place to call home. Both of his maternal grandparents died while he was in his twenties. At this point, his life started to shift as he began to search for a way to stabilize his existence. He was baptized as a Roman Catholic. Almost a year later, World War II began.¹³⁶

Oddly enough, this man who seemed to soak himself in the secular world found his place of stability, his home, when he visited the Abbey of Gethsemani, a Trappist monastery in Kentucky. Merton went on an Easter retreat to the monastery in 1941 and

134. Basil M. Pennington, *Thomas Merton: The Quest for True Freedom* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 168–9.

135. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, 1948), loc. 55, Kindle.

136. Pennington, *Thomas Merton*, 169.

entered the monastery officially as a novice on December tenth of that year. He remained a part of the monastery until his death on December 10, 1968.¹³⁷ During his time as a monk, he was a voracious writer, authoring many books and journals. He entered the life of the monastery to escape from his past and live a life of seclusion.¹³⁸ His writings, however, gained him notoriety as a spiritual man of wisdom. He often was asked to speak at various kinds of events around the world both secular and spiritual. At times, these events hosted people of various religious backgrounds. As such, his view of spirituality, religion, and the world expanded.

Merton was a product of the wisdom and spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, Ignatius, and Benedict. Gerald Sittser described Merton as “a devoted student of the desert saints.”¹³⁹ Prior to his baptism, he considered becoming a Jesuit, the order of monks founded by Ignatius. He wrote of a period in 1938 prior to his baptism where his “life began to be surrounded, interiorly, by Jesuits”¹⁴⁰ as he delved into Jesuit writings. It was the life of the Trappist monk, however, that ultimately drew his devotion. Trappist monks are a branch of the Cistercian order, an offshoot of The Benedictines. Trappist monks adhere to The Rule, albeit a stricter observance than Benedict intended. Merton described Benedictine spirituality as “that concern with doing ordinary things quietly and perfectly for the glory of God which is the beauty of the pure Benedictine life.”¹⁴¹ At

137. Pennington, *Thomas Merton*, 169.

138. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, loc. 55, Kindle.

139. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 94.

140. Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, 232, Kindle.

141. De Waal, *Seeking God*, 30.

Gethsemani, he had found a way of life that brought him structure, peace, humility, and love.

During his initial years at Gethsemani, Merton made a point of avoiding the outside world, devoting a large portion of his time to solitude, silence, and prayer. He devoted himself to the contemplative life, focusing his studies on “more scholastic than existential. On entering into the freedom of the cloister, he embraced an ideal, and that ideal was to bind him for many years. He had turned his back on the world, and not just that world, which was under the bondage of Satan, but insofar as he could, on all that was outside the cloister and even much of his own humanity.”¹⁴² He was quite critical of the world outside the monastery. Perhaps, one can surmise that his past had left him a broken man who wanted to hide away from the temptations and anxieties of the secular world.

In 1948, Merton published his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which offered an in-depth introspection of his spiritual journey that led him to becoming a Trappist monk. His intention in this work was to demonstrate to his readers what he called God’s sanctifying grace, a grace that continually perfects the nature of his people.¹⁴³ This grace is the active involvement of God’s will in individual lives that leads them to their desire to know him and know who he created them to be. This sanctifying grace leads individuals to transformation. In the monastery, Merton realized that he had to stop listening to the voices around him and listen to God’s voice that was calling him from within himself. As he grew in his awareness of this, he began to delve deeper into

142. Pennington, *Thomas Merton*, 89.

143. Merton, *Seven Story Mountain*, 185, Kindle.

various spiritual disciplines, which in turn helped him gain more understanding of who God truly created him to be.

Contrary to Merton's wishes to live a solitary life, the release of his autobiography made him a well-known author. By the time he was ordained as a priest in May 1949, the book had sold over 100,000 copies.¹⁴⁴ With his newfound fame, he started hearing from various dignitaries from around the world as well as a vast number of ordinary people. These interactions with the outside world broadened his views, and he began to rethink his lifestyle of separation from the outside world; in contrast, he now embarked on engaging with it.¹⁴⁵

Through this new engagement with others, Merton formulated a new understanding of the contemplative life, which he described as "the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life, itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive."¹⁴⁶ He suggested that the reason for this fully alive life is an awareness that this life proceeds "from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source."¹⁴⁷ He stated, "Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes both beyond reason and beyond simple faith."¹⁴⁸

144. Merton, *Seven Story Mountain*, loc. 132, Kindle.

145. Ibid., loc. 155–9, Kindle.

146. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 1.

147. Ibid.

148. Ibid.

With this view of contemplation as life proceeding from God, the source, Merton realized that individuals' obstacles to union with God reside "in our 'self,' that is to say in the tenacious need to maintain our separate, external, egotistic will. It is when we refer all things to this outward and false 'self' that we alienate ourselves from reality and from God. It is then the false self that is our god, and we love everything for the sake of this self."¹⁴⁹ This false self that he described is the self that individuals present to the world, a self that is developed based on what the world around them claims they should be. The false self is the corruptible self, the sinful self.¹⁵⁰ Merton suggests that individuals can find joy on earth by escaping from the clutches of this false self and finding union with God.¹⁵¹ In order to escape from the false self, individuals need to reclaim their true self, which is their authentic self, the self God created them to be.

According to Merton, this true self "is to be sought in the invisible depths of our own being, not in our outward reflection in our own acts. We must find our real selves not in the froth stirred up by the impact of our being upon the beings around us, but in our own soul which is the principle of all our acts."¹⁵² He posited that individuals spend their lives wasting time doing things they do not want to do because they do not know who they truly are.¹⁵³ He further asserted,

Ultimately the only way that I can be myself is to become identified with Him in Whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence. Therefore, there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend:

149. Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 21.

150. Ibid.

151. Ibid., 25.

152. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 117.

153. Ibid., 126.

to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself, and if I find my true self, I will find Him.¹⁵⁴

Spiritual directors can utilize Merton's understanding of self to help their directees in seeking God. His teachings on the false self and the true self can help individuals understand themselves better; they can learn to distinguish between their false self and their true self. As they begin to increasingly live life from their true self, they will grow in their relationship with God and in their contemplative life, a life that is both interiorly reflective and a part of the world that surrounds them.

Theological Foundations

Transformation of Self

The theological foundation for spiritual direction is the transformation of self. As stated previously, formation is about something becoming what it was meant to be or emerging from some type of protective covering into its true form. Regardless of religious background, spiritual formation involves one's journey or movement toward a concept of God, who created humans as his masterpiece, his ultimate creation. As Merton words it, "Therefore each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art."¹⁵⁵

God has an intention for humanity—he created human beings for his purposes. From the beginning, he intended that he would be primarily responsible for the formation

154. Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 35–6.

155. *Ibid.*, 30.

of human beings as he formed them in his image. Unfortunately, his intentions were disrupted when his intimate relationship with humanity was corrupted. Thereafter, a rift existed between God and his people. Subsequently, human beings have been exposed to a different type of formation—from birth, they have been impacted and shaped by sin and worldly influences. More specifically, these factors influence their identity, who they believe they are, which distorted identity is the false self.

This false self sits as a defensive layer around the true self, the God-designed self. The false self is a self-protective wall for engagement with the world. The false self is comprised of mindsets that are a combination of how individuals perceive the world and the way they have chosen to interact with that perceived world. This false self expands the distance between individuals and God, a distance already large because of sin. This distance is an external distance, because, in reality, God resides at the center of His people.¹⁵⁶ As an act of love, God does not force individuals to be who he has created them to be or even to love him back. Instead, as an act of grace, God draws people to him; they can decide to accept his invitation or not. When individuals intentionally choose to respond to God's invitation, they "adjust course in order to join the work that God has started in our hearts and in our world. Intention is the essential human element that meets the initiative of God."¹⁵⁷ With intention, individuals join God in unleashing and revealing the true self.

The journey or process of transformation is not an easy one, because it is not outward or obvious; rather, it is an internal transformation. As such, it is not something

156. Jerry Webber, *Spiritual Foundations: Uncovering Your Life in God*, 3rd ed. (Houston: The Center for Christian Spirituality, 2016), 65.

157. *Ibid.*, 50.

individuals can control; instead, it is an act of cooperation with the work that God is doing in the person. Individuals must be willing to let go of control of who they think they are or what they think their life is about and let God have control. This release of control is like a death—in fact, some may find it easier to continue to live under the mask of the false self. The journey of transformation includes personal pain and sacrifice as well as commitment and obedience to God. The process of spiritual formation requires a deepening awareness of God working within one's life. The more the individual opens self to God's work and starts living more consciously by paying more attention to his movement in their lives, the more one can abide in God's presence and the more of the true self is revealed.

As observed in Genesis 1–2 and Psalm 139, God intimately created humans. This intimate connection still exists despite the rift in the relationship. Most people live unconscious of its existence, and, therefore, live their lives searching to retrieve this intimate connection whether they know it or not. Unfortunately, because they are unaware of the intimacy that they truly desire, they search for this intimacy in the wrong places. Their search shows up in relationships, addictions, and any number of things that may provide momentary satisfaction and happiness. Until they understand that the intimacy resides on the inside, however, they will search in all the wrong places, never truly reclaiming the intimacy that they seek.

Living disconnected from this intimacy separates people from their true identity or their true self. Richard Rohr argues that “your True Self is that part of you that knows who you are and whose you are, although largely unconsciously. Your False Self is just

who you think you are—but thinking doesn’t make it so.”¹⁵⁸ Without the connection to the true self, human relationships take the place of God in the creation of identity which leads to the formation of the false identity or false self. The journey of transformation is a personal journey back towards God’s original intention—towards the true self. This journey is not an outward journey of action; instead, it is an inward journey of inaction. God resides at the core of his human creation; therefore, the intimacy being sought is already contained within his creation. The journey of transformation involves an opportunity to reveal this true intimacy, which also leads toward one’s true identity. Contemplation lays the foundation for a return to intimacy.¹⁵⁹

Contemplation removes the distractions that keep individuals from experiencing God’s intimacy and his love. Included in these distractions is a wrong view of God, leading some to believe that God is distant and harsh. They believe that they must earn his love, an impossible quest.¹⁶⁰ Thomas Merton expresses,

In all the situations of life, the “will of God” comes to us not merely as an external dictate of impersonal law but above all as an interior invitation of personal love. Too often the conventional conception of “God’s will” as a sphinx-like and arbitrary force bearing down upon us with implacable hostility, leads men to lose faith in a God they cannot find it possible to love.¹⁶¹

158. Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 15 Ibooks.

159. Keating, *Human Condition*, loc 39-58

160. Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 1-2.

161. Merton, *New Seeds*, 15.

This love is a gift of God that contradicts such a conventional conception. Contemplation opens the heart for the reception of this gift of love which then becomes the center of true identity.

The transformation of self begins and ends with God. In an act of grace, God is working continually in the lives of his children, spiritually forming, transforming, and revealing more of the true self that he designed. In this transformation process, God works on the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit. The more God’s children are aware of his presence and transformative work, the more they surrender to his will. In the process, the false self that they created out of a need to belong in the world becomes less dominant, and the more the true self, the self that God created them to be, becomes present. In this journey of the transformation of self, a growth in openness of heart brings about more definition of self. This growth in self-definition allows them to surrender more of themselves to God, which creates more freedom in life.

Spiritual Direction

A broad definition of spiritual direction was presented in the previous chapter. Basically, spiritual directors assist directees in opening themselves up to listen to God. As such, spiritual direction is a resource utilized in the transformation of self.

Spiritual direction is a contemplative prayer practice that began with the Desert Fathers and Mothers, which can be a starting point for inception into the contemplative life, a life of prayer. Contemplation is not a step taken without some sort of introduction. Spiritual directors are experienced in contemplation, and they have obtained a mature level of outward expression of a life of contemplation. The guidance of a spiritual

director and a growing awareness of God's presence strengthens directees' receptivity to the formative work available in other forms of contemplative prayer.

Thomas Keating, one of the major contemporary writers about contemplation, calls it "divine therapy."¹⁶² This divine therapy is attributed to the power of God, which is intrinsic in contemplation. This power can bring about transformation with the byproducts of increased wisdom and discernment. At its core, contemplation is about a deepening connection with God, which results in a growth in humility and compassion. To synthesize these various aspects of contemplation is to view it as a radical and subversive act of faith. *Merriam-Webster* defines radical as proceeding from a root and relating to the origin.¹⁶³ Another definition is "very different from the usual or tradition."¹⁶⁴ For something to be radical means that it goes against the norm, yet it is foundational and stems from the source. In the case of Christians, this source is God. According to *Merriam-Webster*, the act of subversion is "a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by persons working secretly from within."¹⁶⁵ Contemplation, thus, is subversive because it is not an action that can be seen; however, it can secretly transform a system or an individual from the interior without the assistance of exterior means. Contemplation cuts through the status quo in an unseen way by reconnecting people to their original source, God. Contemplation is a

162. Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 38.

163. Merriam-Webster, "Radical," accessed October 11, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical>.

164. Ibid.

165. Merriam-Webster, "Subversive," accessed October 11, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subversive>.

form of protest against the culture. It is social justice in the sense that it stands against the wrongs of the world by connecting to the ultimate right.

Contemplation is a simple concept. Practitioners intentionally create space for God's presence in their lives by partaking in contemplative prayer practices. Although the concept of contemplation is simple and straightforward, defining what takes place in contemplation is much more difficult because what transpires is personal to the individual and elusive to define. When well-versed practitioners explain contemplation, "Seldom do they offer anything corresponding to a definition. Instead, they offer us images and metaphors—word pictures that evoke inner associations that connect us to a richness that literal language can never communicate."¹⁶⁶ With this in mind, imagery will be used to try to explain a personal perception of contemplation.

The introduction to contemplation is like standing on the shore of a body of flowing water. The shore is a comfortable place, a familiar place, a place of conformity and compliance. The water is an uncomplicated entity, something easily recognizable; however, the power of the water is beyond comprehension. Something as simple as water has the ability to transform whatever it touches. The water is uncontrollable and unpredictable. The only way to experience the water's effects is to enter into it. This entrance requires the relinquishing of personal control and a submission to the mystery of the water. The curious have some idea of what could potentially happen when entering the water because of the experience of previous entrants.

166. David Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 133, Kindle.

The contemplative experience can be likened to stepping off the shore and entering the flowing water. The willing participants enter the water covered in layers of protection, dirtiness, and issues—they enter with their false self. Upon entering and submitting to the water, the water goes to work without any effort from the participants. However, at times, participants may struggle and suffer against the flow of water because of the difficulty of letting go of control over what is happening. The flow of the water can cleanse away a layer immediately or it can be a slow process where there is a need to return to the water again and again. Emergence from the water leaves the participants feeling different, feeling cleansed, feeling more like themselves. The water cleansing reveals more and more of their true self, their God-centered self.

The contemplative life is a life of prayer.¹⁶⁷ This prayer is not a petitioning prayer where someone makes requests of God; such petitioning prayer requires many words. Contemplative prayer is a wordless prayer, an inward prayer. This type of prayer allows for the observance of one's life through the divine filter of God. In return, life becomes a flow or outpouring of God. "Contemplative practices are held by postures of solitude, silence, and stillness. In solitude, we develop the capacity to be present. In silence, we cultivate the ability to listen. And in stillness we acquire the skill of restraint or self-control."¹⁶⁸ These outcomes are reflective of the radical and subversive nature of contemplation.

Transformation of self is a work of the whole person; therefore, spiritual direction should address the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit. The purpose of

167. Benner, *Opening to God*, 162, Kindle.

168. Heuertz, *Mindful Silence*, 8.

suggesting the sectioning in this manner is not to suggest that these practices only work on a certain aspect of the person. Rather, the various parts of the self work in conjunction with other parts, with one part affecting the others. The reason for the delineation is to give directees some focus in creating a contemplative lifestyle that works for them. The following is an explanation of how directees will be guided in the practice of developing a contemplative lifestyle that will focus on each aspect of the self—body, soul, mind, and spirit. For simplification purposes, a specific prayer posture (solitude, silence, stillness) will be associated with each facet of the person although the various prayer postures actually work in partnership towards the goal of revealing the true self. In addition, specific contemplative prayer practices will be offered for each aspect. For further clarification, Jesus will be utilized as the ultimate example of the contemplative life—a life of prayer.

Body

The body is a person's physical reality, the "focal point of our presence in the physical and social world. In union with it we come into existence, and we become the person we shall forever be. . . . And it is the point through which we are stimulated by the world beyond ourselves and where we find and are found by others."¹⁶⁹ The contemporary world is filled with distractions and activity, with which the body interacts and keeps the rest of the self from being present to God. To create space for God's transformative work to take place, the body needs moments of removal from all the distractions. Without the distractions garnering attention, "Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter—the struggle against the compulsions of the false

169. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 35.

self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.”¹⁷⁰ The spiritual director will inform directees on how the body needs solitude. By engaging in solitude, the distractions of the world are removed allowing the body to be present to God.

Jesus often engaged in solitude; he is often witnessed leaving the crowd and going away alone to pray and as a method of preparation. The first thing he did after he was baptized and before he started his ministry was to go alone into the wilderness (Luke 4). He also engaged in solitude to deal with his human emotions and human need for restoration (Matt. 14:13, 23; Mark 6:30–2). Mostly, he simply engaged in solitude to seek his father’s wisdom and comfort (Luke 5:16; 6:12–13). Jesus did not go to his disciples or to the world for his guidance; rather, he slipped away to be alone with his source, God. Henri Nouwen asserts, “Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered this furnace. . . . There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity.”¹⁷¹ In the solitude of the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus wrestled alone with his humanity and the will of God for his life. He brought his three closest disciples with him, but he entered the Garden alone. He knew, for the next step in his journey, that he needed a type of strength and courage that another human could not give him. He was about to do something radical and subversive—he was going to willingly give up his life

170. Henri J. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 26.

171. *Ibid.*, 25.

for people who did not deserve it (Luke 22:39-46). He walked away from the Garden strengthened in God's will for his life.

The body is foundational for creating the environment for transformation to take place. For the body to be brought into alignment with the transformation of self, the spiritual director will instruct directees to develop a Rule of Life. The spiritual director considers the Rule of Life to be an organizing tool for the body. It is also a way for the directee to bring their body and its corresponding passions under submission. The Rule is a way to discipline the body; it is a way of presenting the body as a living sacrifice to God. The Rule is a commitment to God of the actions, such as solitude and other spiritual disciplines, being submitted to him regularly and consistently. The Rule gives individuals an organized way for them to become aware of God's presence in their lives.

The result of the contemplative action of engaging in solitude and submitting one's body as a sacrifice to God by the enacting the Rule of Life is a heightened humility. This humility is individuals' understanding their place in God's creation and will. They are not in control; God is in control of their lives.

Soul and Mind

The soul and the mind are two separate facets of the self, although at times they can be hard to distinguish and hard to explain. The soul is the connecting point of all components of the self. It organizes the various components into what others may view as someone's personality or character. The soul gives definition and identity to the person; it is the part of the self that can be labeled and named by others.¹⁷² The mind is the locale of

172. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 37.

thoughts and emotions. Thoughts and emotions can be employed as tools for self-discovery.¹⁷³

Silence is the prayer posture to utilize in the transformation process of the soul and the mind. It is a powerful way to separate from the noise of the things that are vying for control over someone's life, including one's own words. Nouwen declares, "Speaking is dangerous and easily leads us away from the right path. The central idea underlying these ascetic teachings is that speaking gets us involved in the affairs of the world, and it is very hard to be involved without becoming entangled in and polluted by the world."¹⁷⁴ Two movements transpire in silence—listening and reflecting. Peterson describes listening as "an interpersonal act The listener is required to be attentive to the speaker and is more or less at the speaker's mercy."¹⁷⁵ He asks the question, "But what good is a speaking God without listening human ears? So God gets a pick and shovel and digs through the cranial granite, opening a passage that will give access to the interior depths, into the mind and heart."¹⁷⁶ Reflection involves paying attention to one's life because even the "Insignificant moments when looked at each day become significant because they form a pattern that often points the way to how God wants to give us more life."¹⁷⁷ Silence helps the soul to step back from the world and resist its conforming

173. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 32-33.

174. Ibid., 51.

175. Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 88.

176. Ibid., 101.

177. Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995), loc 121, Kindle.

pressure. It allows the soul to listen to both God and all the different facets of the self. Silence helps calm the mind, so practitioners can reflect on and analyze their thoughts and emotions without distractions. Silence opens the space for mind renewal to take place. Both the soul and the mind are essential to the understanding and development of the meaning and purpose of one's life.

Jesus taught about the importance of silence in prayer, telling his listeners in the Sermon on the Mount “not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full” (Matt. 6:5, NASB). Such hypocrites want others to know their every thought and consider that eloquence equals a deep relationship with God. Their rewards are the opinions and good thoughts of other people. Their false self is built up by what the world thinks; they are conformed to the world.

Jesus proposes a more radical and subversive type of prayer. He tells them,

Go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. (Matt. 6:6–8)

This inner room represents that place inside the self where God resides. This place is hidden from the view and grasp of the outer world. This secret place circumvents the influence and control of the culture, and just as in solitude, it allows people to connect with their source, God. Peterson suggests, “We restore prayer to its context in God's word. Prayer is not something we think up to get God's attention or enlist his favor.

Prayer is answering speech. The first word is God's word."¹⁷⁸ Meaningless words are not necessary because God already knows one's needs.

The soul can listen to God and the other aspects of the self through the contemplative prayer practice of *lectio Divina*, a contemplative prayer practice that helps individuals pay attention to God's personal words to them. A form of *lectio Divina* was utilized by the Desert Fathers and Mothers, but it became a distinguished prayer practice when St. Benedict instituted it in his Rule for monastics in the sixth century. Thelma Hall defines *lectio Divina* as a prayer practice that prepares a person for contemplation "by leading us to a meeting place with him in our deepest center, his life-giving dwelling place. It begins this movement by introducing us to the power of the word of God in scripture to speak to the most intimate depths of our hearts, to gift and challenge and change us, and to promote genuine spiritual growth and maturity."¹⁷⁹ This type of engagement is not about learning but rather about listening, a deeper listening than just what the words on the page convey. This type of listening is antagonistic to typical, contemporary Scripture reading because the reader is not in control of the outcome. It is not about the analytical dissection of the words, but it is about absorption of the inner man into the Word. This type of engagement can dismantle the false self.

Lectio Divina is about reconnecting to the intimacy inherent in one's relationship with God. In similarity to the experience of human relationships, one's love relationship with God increases "through a continuum of knowing, trusting, desiring, surrendering our

178. Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 47.

179. Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 7, Kindle.

defenses and fears, and ultimately our very selves, to the Beloved.”¹⁸⁰ As in human relationships, listening well is a key component to the increase in intimacy and love. Through *lectio Divina*, the increase “corresponds with the deepening levels of prayer which are encompassed in the process of *Lectio* with its four progressive phases, flowing from reflection on the word of scripture to spontaneous prayer and then to a silent presence to God in love.”¹⁸¹

The four progressive phases of *lectio Divina* are *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. *Lectio* is the reading of the chosen Scripture verses, which are read slowly and attentively several times, pausing between each read to let the words take root in the spirit. *Meditatio* is the reflecting on the verses, which involves deeply considering words or phrases that resonate with the reader. *Oratio* is the responding to what God is speaking. *Contemplatio* is about dwelling in God’s presence as a culmination and a sealing of the prayer time which results in the reader’s increased trust in God and knowledge of his love.¹⁸²

The mind can engage in silence through reflection by utilizing the contemplative prayer practice of the *Examen*, a type of prayer that helps partakers pay attention to God’s movement in their lives. Marjorie Thompson states that this prayer practice “sharpens our awareness of both positive and negative aspects of our attitudes and behaviors”¹⁸³ and

180. Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 27–8, Kindle.

181. *Ibid.*, 7, Kindle.

182. Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 56-58.

183. Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: The Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 97, Kindle.

that “the whole point of self-examination is to become more God-centered by observing the moments when we are or are not so.”¹⁸⁴ This prayer helps individuals become cognizant of what goes on in their unconscious.

By learning to observe their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and attitudes, whether good or bad, that transpire during the day, practitioners are able “to notice where God’s grace has been present in our day and to see where we have or have not responded to that grace. What we call ‘consciousness’ includes awareness of both external and internal realities.”¹⁸⁵ When St. Ignatius cultivated the *Examen* in sixteenth century, “he expected that God would speak through our deepest feelings and yearnings, what he called ‘consolation’ and ‘desolation.’ For us, consolation is whatever helps us connect with ourselves, others, God, and the universe. Desolation is whatever disconnects us.”¹⁸⁶ In consolation, “God’s will is generally for us to do more of whatever we are most grateful for or whatever gives us most life.”¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, God’s will also exists in those things that drain individuals of life. In desolation, partakers recognize the things that are not a part of God’s will. This recognition includes an understanding of how God speaks through suffering and offers his love even in pain.¹⁸⁸ Through the recognition of consolations and desolations, practitioners also can recognize the difference between the false self and the true self as well as how they are God’s unique creation.

184. Thompson, *Soul Feast*, Kindle.

185. Ibid., 104, Kindle.

186. Linn, et al., *Sleeping with Bread*, loc 128, Kindle.

187. Ibid., loc 40, Kindle.

188. Ibid., loc 74, Kindle.

Because the soul and the mind are the parts of the self that individuals can actively engage with and learn from, the spiritual director encourages directees to engage in other types of activities to deepen their understanding of the true self. The Enneagram is a great tool to determine directees' way of being in the world and clarify the nature of their soul.

The Enneagram is believed to date back to the Desert Fathers and was passed down through the ages as an instrument individuals could use for self-discovery.¹⁸⁹ In addition, the spiritual director will recommend employing creative outlets such as art or poetry to delve into directees' thoughts and emotions. Journaling is another excellent tool for personal reflection.

Spirit

The spirit is at the core of an individual, the place where the will and heart reside. In fact, the terms "spirit," "will," and "heart" are used interchangeably to describe this core place.¹⁹⁰ The spirit is where a person's freedom of choice resides; it is the core place where Adam and Eve made the choice to eat the forbidden fruit. Choice involves all the other aspects of the self as they inform the spirit; however, the spirit makes the ultimate choice on how to proceed. This is the place where God does his formative work. The spirit's choices affect the other aspects of the self. The more God informs the choices of

189. Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), loc. 144-147, Kindle. A more in-depth explanation of the Enneagram is presented in Chapter III.

190. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 29.

the spirit, the more the choices will have a godly influence on the rest of the self. Willard states,

Single-minded and joyous devotion to God and his will, to what God wants for us—and to service to him and to others because of him—is what the will transformed into Christlikeness looks like. That is the outcome of Christian spiritual formation with reference to the will, heart, or spirit. And this outcome becomes our character when it has become the governing response of every dimension of our being.¹⁹¹

Stillness is the prayer posture that helps in the spirit's submission to God's influence. By definition, stillness is a lack of movement as such a lack of choice.¹⁹² Juanita Campbell Rasmus proposes that “in the stillness God, who is the ‘I am,’ is revealed and made known, and likewise I am coming to know the me who is as well. This is being born again for me from above and from within.”¹⁹³ In stillness, Jesus did not move beyond the direction of his Father. Because he had a confident trust that God was in control of everything, he did not have to rush about making rash decisions and moves.

A great example of this still confidence is when Jesus is asleep on a boat with his disciples when a storm arises. Amid the storm, he is still; he is so still that he can rest. As his disciples are panicking around him, he is still. When his disciples wake him up, he simply “rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:35–9, KJV). In stillness, Jesus reflects a great faith. In fact, after he calms the storm, he turns to his disciples and asks them why they had so little faith (Mark 4:40). Jesus's great faith allows him to call upon peace and calm in the

191. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 143.

192. Merriam-Webster, “Stillness,” accessed September 11, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stillness>.

193. Juanita Campbell-Rasmus, *Learning to Be: Finding Your Center After the Bottom Falls Out* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 90.

midst of turmoil because he already knows that God is in complete control of the situation.

Centering Prayer is a contemplative prayer practice that involves stillness. It was brought back into modern practice by Thomas Keating in the 1970s. Keating asserts that this prayer format originated in the work of the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.¹⁹⁴ Centering prayer is not about spoken words; it is a silent prayer. For the prayer, a sacred word is chosen to silently use as a point of “intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.”¹⁹⁵ This word is returned to whenever thoughts try to take over. Instead of using words to petition God, a word or a few words are used to disconnect from the world to focus on God. Thoughts may come up during these prayers, but the designated word(s) return the focus to God.

The spiritual direction relationship is not a hierarchical relationship but a relationship of peers. In this type of relationship, reciprocal growth, change, and learning can take place. The directee is not the only one God is working on in this relationship. There may be things that the directee discusses or learns that can be impactful to the spiritual director, since directors are on their own spiritual formation journeys as well. The next chapter explores this relationship through the action plan that was formulated based on the above research.

194. Keating, *Intimacy with God*, x.

195. *Ibid.*, 16.

Chapter III

Plan of Action: Spiritual Direction Training and Practice

An in-depth analysis of spiritual formation and spiritual direction from the biblical, historical, and theological perspectives comprised the preceding chapter. Using the information gathered from those combined perspectives, a strategy was formed for the project's plan of action. Knowledge concerning the process of the transformation of self is a good starting place for persons seeking to transform their lives and experience spiritual growth. Knowledge alone, however, does not lead to lasting transformation; rather, action is required for real progress to be made. Consistent meetings with a spiritual director can assist individuals in moving from knowledge to action as spiritual directors offer them support and accountability in the processes related to transformation of self.

Transformation of self is an individualized process that generally does not happen quickly. Time and patience are necessary elements for authentic and long-term transformation. A large part of this process requires people to see their lives differently. Rohr contends that contemporary Christians have been anesthetized by the culture and are walking around asleep to their spiritual potential. He suggests that "all religious teachers have recognized that we human beings do not naturally see; we have to be taught how to see."¹ One such religious teacher, Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, prays that

1. Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, 29, Kindle.

God gives his readers “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” and that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” to know God better and all that had been given to them (Eph. 1:17–18, NIV). Spiritual direction is a methodology that teaches participants to see, which occurs through practices related to the spiritual disciplines and through the dismantling of the false self. Seeing life differently requires one to move from an unconscious to a conscious state of being. Consciousness denotes a greater awareness of the fullness of one’s life and an awakening of the self; it combines becoming more of one’s true self while dying to one’s false self concurrently.²

Experience and community are two things that can be offered by spiritual directors to aid others in becoming conscious in this transformation process. Experience involves practice and reflection. Spiritual directors assist partakers in deciding on types of spiritual disciplines that would help their transformation. The spiritual directors offer accountability as partakers engage in these practices consistently as well as the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the practices. The combination of practicing the spiritual discipline and reflecting on it creates the experience. Community consists of the person or persons who walk alongside the individual as mentors, companions, and sources of support and/or accountability in their process of transformation. This is the type of community that the spiritual director offers.

Becoming Conscious

Before a person can offer spiritual direction to others, a sufficient level of spiritual maturity should be attained. To possess this level of spiritual maturity, one must have

2. Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*, 20, Ibooks.

been taught how to see—in other words, he or she must have become conscious. The following is a personal synopsis of the spiritual direction path to consciousness, starting with an overview of training to become a spiritual director and ending with experience as a spiritual director.

Spiritual Director Training

Prior to training to become a spiritual director, previous church experiences were a large part of spiritual formation up to that point in life. More than twenty years had been spent in church leadership searching for something external to self to be the key to growth in relationship with God. Over the years, plenty of knowledge about spiritual and Christian things had been acquired, but only a small amount of knowledge about what was going on within had been attained. Consumed by unidentified emotional turmoil and trauma as well as insecurities about identity, the view was of

spiritual life as a static possession rather than a dynamic and ever-developing growth toward wholeness in the image of Christ. When spirituality is viewed as a static possession, the way to spiritual wholeness is seen as the acquisition of information and techniques that enable us to gain possession of the desired state of spirituality. Discipleship is perceived as ‘my’ spiritual life and tends to be defined by actions that ensure its possession.³

This state was of living life largely unconscious. As Phileena Heuertz describes it,

We are asleep to our unconscious motivations, and these motivations mask our True Self. In essence we are hiding. And the wound in our soul remains unhealed, infecting every aspect of our lives. We are so asleep to our reality that we don’t know we are hiding behind the masks of our [F]alse [S]elf. In our slumber we are unable to distinguish between what is true and what is false. These masks become so familiar to us, they become a part of our very identity.⁴

3. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 16.

4. Phileena Heuertz, *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2017), 19, Kindle.

Participation in graduate courses at Houston Graduate School of Theology (HGST) proved to be a significant factor in the diagnosis of the state of unconsciousness. The courses gave a greater understanding of how experiences, perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes significantly had impacted the previous way of functioning in the world and the former way of showing up in relationships, work, and everyday life. The following is an overview of the courses that had the most significant impact on spiritual direction training.

Bowen Family Systems Theory

A key component in spiritual formation is one's relationship with family members. HGST's courses exposed students to the Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST), which gave a different way to understand relationships with family. BFST is a scientific theory that explains the unseen exchanges that transpire between individuals in relationships. The theory describes relationships as emotional systems chock-full of anxiety. The flow of anxiety in these emotional systems dictates the way a person functions in these systems as well as his or her position in these systems. BFST was originally constructed by Murray Bowen to address family relationships.⁵

According to BFST, the family of origin is significant to developing the way someone responds to the anxiety present in relationships as well as how "self" is presented to the world. BFST asserts that an unseen togetherness force acts as a glue that binds the family together. This togetherness force can cause individuals to relinquish

5. Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2004), 56, Kindle.

parts of their “self” to maintain the unity of the family. In BFST, this relinquishing of self is called fusion. When fusion is experienced in families, it is difficult to distinguish the uniqueness of the individual members. Persons carry this relationship knowledge into adulthood, continuing to demonstrate the same patterns of reactivity in adult relationships.⁶

As adults, the false self that was created to define and protect them is already well established. The false self “is a desire to preserve an image of our self and a way of relating to the world. This is our personal style—how we think of ourselves and how we want others to see us and think of us.”⁷ According to BFST, all of these ways of being in emotional systems happens below consciousness. Therefore, emotional issues arising in relationships with friends, associates, and family are handled in the same ways as in the family of origin. BFST suggests that differentiation of self is a way a person can separate from the emotional system. “Differentiation deals with the effort to define oneself, to control oneself, to become a more responsible person, and to permit others to be themselves as well. Differentiation is the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and behavior determined by them.”⁸ BFST’s concept of differentiation of self offers a way to move toward the true self.

6. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group*, 9-11, Kindle.

7. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 75-76, Kindle.

8. Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 28, Kindle.

Through study of BFST came an introduction to the family diagram as a tool to go deeper into one's family history. Instruction on constructing a family diagram emphasized taking a broad view of the family to distinguish patterns of behavior, beliefs, and attitudes that were inherent from one family member to another, and through the generations.⁹ Using the family diagram inspired reflection on the ways of having been foundationally formed in the family of origin and how current methods of functioning had been established in her extended family. BFST helped reveal how this original formation was obstructing the spiritual formation journey to Christlikeness. This led to realizing typical emotional reactions to anxiety in relationships as well as areas of fusion. BFST allowed the recognition of how relationships with the family of origin impacted the present way of being in the world. This understanding of self brought about new insights regarding showing up in relationships and leadership roles. These revelations began the process of demolishing the false self that had been created, thereby revealing more of the true self.

While beginning to define self by understanding more of the true self, transformation was seen in emotional reactivity to anxiety. This transformation has had a profound effect on both life and relationships. Instead of making decisions and interacting with others based on unconscious emotional reactions, new ways of operation were now based on the true self and those well-defined beliefs, values, and principles. Becoming a non-anxious presence in the face of relationship anxiety has become a key focus of functionality. Being a non-anxious presence implies the ability to maintain a connection to others despite issues or conflicts. These changes in behavior allow for

9. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation.*, 70-74, Kindle.

growth to becoming a better, more present spiritual director, especially having a non-anxious presence in the face of directees' issues. According to BFST, the ability to maintain a non-anxious presence and stay connected to one's directees will help bring them to a higher level of functioning.¹⁰

Roles of Spiritual Direction

Another set of HGST courses that were meaningful to spiritual direction training were centered on spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual direction. Included was an introduction to historical and contemporary thought leaders in these areas. Through the study of the lives of these people and their writings, theories of spiritual formation and spiritual direction were developed, most of which was presented in the previous chapter. Here, these courses are reviewed from the perspective of their impact on training to become a spiritual director. The courses addressed two areas of the director's training, one of which was specific to how to conduct spiritual direction sessions. The other area was personal, addressing the matter of developing consciousness.

Spiritual direction is the imaginative creation of an open and safe space between participants where God is welcomed to dwell and interact with them. To create this open and safe space for directees, the HGST courses taught that there are two significant roles in the spiritual direction sessions. The primary role is to be a listener, and the secondary role is to be a resource.

The role of the listener is to serve as a mediator between God and the directee. A mediator is not to judge, counsel, diagnose, or advise in the sense of a psychologist or a

10. Creech, *Family Systems*, 54.

therapist, although a director should have knowledge of psychological information in case the directee needs that kind of care. There is a special skill required in this type of listening as “it is hard work for people accustomed to straightening each other out as a way of life.”¹¹ Spiritual directors who attempt to fix their directees do so on the basis of what they consider to be the right thing to do.¹² These factors are some of the reasons why the type of listening necessary for spiritual direction requires training; it does not come naturally to people. The spiritual director must learn to be mindful that the core of the directee wants to speak and wants to be sincerely and authentically heard. Palmer proposes, “If your problem is soul-deep, your soul alone knows what you need to do about it.”¹³

To be a good listener, the spiritual director should strive to create a distraction-free setting for the session to take place. This type of setting will allow the spiritual director to focus all attention on the directee. In addition, the spiritual director should also refrain from speaking too much by inserting thoughts into the session unless it will help in the directee’s listening process. By allowing for moments of silence and maintaining a focus on the directee, the directee’s inner teacher, as the Quakers call it, will help the directee to discern what God may be saying.¹⁴ Spiritual directors guide individuals in this discernment process, providing ways for them to use their intellect less and to reflect more on their feelings or impressions of the Spirit’s directions.

11. Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), loc. 1175, Kindle.

12. Ibid., loc. 1186, Kindle.

13. Ibid., Kindle.

14. Ibid., loc. 1378, Kindle.

Spiritual directors provide a place of comfort and safety for individuals to feel vulnerable while they are exploring God's will for their lives. Because spiritual directors have already faced some of the experiences that their directees will encounter in their discernment process, they will be able to encourage and support them in the process. Spiritual directors also understand their place in the spiritual discernment process, in that they are not the ones choosing the action that follows the discernment—those choices are solely the responsibility of the directees. The director's role is to be "a co-discerner. The primary discerner is the directee. The role of the director is not to make the directee perpetually dependent on himself or herself, but to bring the directee to that personal experience of the Lord which will enable one to make personal discerning judgments about the will of God in his or her life."¹⁵ The goal of the spiritual director "is to help one come to maturity of spirit; to bring the soul to an ever-deeper knowledge of, and an ever-greater sensitivity to, the Spirit of God."¹⁶ This deeper knowledge and sensitivity assists the directee in his or her transformation of self.

The spiritual director's secondary role is to be a resource, which includes the need to be knowledgeable about the various spiritual practices available for their directees to employ to deepen the practice of discernment and aid transformation. In HGST's courses, traditional and contemporary spiritual practices were learned about and engaged in to be that resource for directees. Some of these spiritual practices that were most impactful are highlighted in the preceding chapter. On the personal side, Keating exhorts,

As spiritual directors, we need to pay attention to our own spiritual nurturing. We ourselves have to be qualified by faithful practice of contemplative prayer and by taking the time to remain authentic and to grow by means of regular retreat days

15. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, 623.

16. *Ibid.*, 63.

and yearly retreats to deepen our own experience of the path. The deeper our experience of the path, the more we will be able to support others on theirs.¹⁷

Spiritual directors cannot lead directees to places they have not been, which makes it necessary for them “to be aware of the dynamics of his or her own personality with its dark side and its special needs.”¹⁸

Professors tasked students with translating the knowledge gained from their courses into experience. Problems arose immediately when encountering an unexplainable interior resistance whenever an assignment required practicing a spiritual discipline and reflecting on it. The assignments were neither difficult nor impossible to complete. The resistance showed up bodily through tension, emotionally through either anger, sadness, or depression, and mentally through negative thoughts. A change was needed before embarking on the role of offering spiritual direction to other people. Life had to be seen differently, along with a better understanding of the state of spirituality and spiritual formation up to this point. The last thing wanted was to hinder the progress of would-be directees because of brokenness or misguided intentions and beliefs.

Initially, it was believed possible to think through these resistances. This method of thinking of a solution was the normal mode of dealing with problems. Subsequently, it was learned about the false self and true self through some of the courses. This teaching was the key insight needed to aid in contemplative practices and spiritual disciplines, after which the resistance was recognized as the false self, which tried to protect itself from transformation. The false self viewed transformation as a threat to its existence, and it had a heavy-duty stronghold that it refused to let go. Thomas Keating explains, “The

17. Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 89.

18. *Ibid.*, 88.

contemplative journey, because it involves the purification of the unconscious, is not a magic carpet to bliss. It is an exercise of letting go of the false self, a humbling process, because it is the only self we know.”¹⁹ He calls this process divine therapy, which employs contemplation to deal with a person’s conscious behaviors and the unconscious motivations behind them. The disconnect between the conscious and the unconscious is what needs healing.²⁰ Divine therapy or contemplation is the answer to this healing as well as to the dismantling of the false self and revelation of the true self.²¹ Part of the humiliation of the false self is the acceptance of the fact that one is damaged and has wounds, wounds that one does not even realize existed yet have a big impact on how they show up in the world.

Practicing Contemplation

The enormity of these humiliations was felt when participating in the silent retreats that were required activities of some of these HGST courses. The first silent retreat was a four-hour informal retreat that was done alone in a park, which was the first time doing anything like it. This retreat produced anxiety. The thought was that people in the park would be judgmental or consider it strange to be alone doing nothing for four hours. In fact, it caused physical illness, requiring leaving slightly early.

The second retreat was an extended retreat at the Ruah Spirituality Center on the campus of the Villa De Matel Convent in Houston. Guests who stay at the Center for a retreat are offered complete silence and solitude for the entirety of their stay. As with the

19. Keating, *The Human Condition*, loc. 142-143, Kindle.

20. Ibid., loc. 198–202, Kindle.

21. Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 42.

previous retreat, anxiety was experienced prior to the retreat. For some reason, the thought persisted that something would happen yielding a feeling of foolishness during the stay. The feeling of not being in control and not knowing what to expect during the stay was abhorrent. What resulted, however, were the most peaceful and thought-provoking few days that had been experienced in a long time. Time was spent resting, reading, reflecting, and wandering around the campus. The silence and solitude were found to be strangely comforting and uplifting to the soul. Some inspiring revelations occurred during the time there, and, surprisingly, the result of staying at the Center was feeling refreshed, renewed, and motivated. Afterward, it became apparent that the reason for having this type of experience on this retreat was because the retreat center was designated for solitude and silence, and the false self was able to relax as soon as it realized that no one would be bothering, and there would be no experience of judgment from anyone there. The protection of the false self was not needed, and the true self stepped forward and revealed some things that had been residing within.

The final retreat was a twenty-four-hour retreat organized for the entire class by one of the professors. The retreat was held at the Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center which is also in Houston. This time, there was none of the anxiety that had been experienced prior to the other retreats. There were a couple of reasons for this calm. First, the process of a silent retreat was familiar, so it was known what to expect. This fact gave a feeling of security and control. Second, it was going to be with classmates, people who had grown to know each other well, and with whom there was no fear of judgment.

While wrestling with the resistances and strongholds of the false self, the Enneagram was discovered, which Richard Rohr defines, “Enneagram is a very ancient

Christian tool for the discernment of spirits, the struggle with our capital sin, our ‘false self,’ and the encounter with our True Self in God.”²² Basically, the Enneagram delineates individuals into nine personality types, and contained within each type is an explanation of individuals’ false selves and true selves. By delving into the Enneagram, understanding began of the degree to which there was an unconsciousness of motivations and a sense of being asleep to life.

To learn about the Enneagram, several books were read, and a variety of podcasts listened to that were hosted by trained Enneagram specialists such as Suzanne Stabile and Ian Morgan Cron. Using these resources helped develop a basic understanding of the Enneagram. An Enneagram type began to emerge, but help was needed to clarify it. The decision was made to attend a half-day workshop hosted by Leadership Transformations Inc., an organization dedicated to the spiritual formation of Christian leaders, to narrow down and discover the type.²³ Prior to the workshop, an online test had been taken, offered by Enneagram expert, James Wagner, called the Wagner Enneagram Personality Styles Scales (WEPSS).²⁴ The test results were informative and gave information about a possible type. The workshop presented detailed information about each Enneagram type, which resulted in more confidence about the type and a better understanding of self. The workshop helped to bring understanding regarding underlying motivations and weaknesses. Chris Heuertz states that the Enneagram “explains the ‘why’ of how we think, act, and feel. It helps us come to terms with our gifts as well as the addictive

22. Rohr and Ebert, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, loc. 238, Kindle.

23. Leadership Transformations Inc., accessed September 12, 2019, <https://www.leadershiptransformations.org>.

24. Wagner Enneagram Personality Styles Scales, accessed September 12, 2019, <https://wepss.com/>.

patterns that tether us to our greatest interpersonal, spiritual, and emotional challenges.

The Enneagram invites us to deeper self-awareness as a doorway to spiritual growth.”²⁵

Adding to these experiences was participation in a week-long Enneagram webinar through the Shift Network.²⁶ The webinar featured a variety of Enneagram experts from around the country and some international teachers with differing specialties and career paths. The purpose of the webinar was to provide a depth of information about the workings of each Enneagram type within individuals, along with spiritual practices and other types of exercises that could be done to help with growth. It also provided information about the benefits of the Enneagram to various social issues and careers. Because of the help the Enneagram gave, the belief was that it would be a valuable tool to offer directees.

Another advance in articulation of self was realized through an online course geared toward self-awareness offered by Faithwalking, an organization dedicated to helping participants transform their lives through spiritual formation.²⁷ Whereas the Enneagram helped to understand personality by defining strengths and weaknesses, Faithwalking helped to deal with wounds by naming them and dealing with them. Faithwalking provided a focused way of digging deep into the false self and unraveling some of its layers by reflecting on patterns of behavior in reaction to specific triggers.

Yet another means of articulation production were the regular monthly meetings with the chosen spiritual director, which had begun in November 2018. When searching

25. Christopher L. Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 25-26.

26. The Shift Network, accessed December 3, 2020, <https://theshiftnetwork.com>.

27. Faithwalking, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://www.faithwalking.us>.

for a spiritual director, the same anxiety and resistances were experienced as had happened with the other spiritual practices. Finding a female spiritual director who had similar interests enabled a slightly more comfortable feeling about the situation. Over the time of meeting together, some truths about self were discovered and some transformation was experienced. The belief is that these occurred because the chosen spiritual director listened with an open mind and without judgment. She only offered encouragement, support, and spiritual practice resources when deemed necessary. The belief is that these meetings will continue even after the HGST program ends.

The Gift of Consciousness

The series of humiliations to the false self that were experienced during training led to a greater degree of compassion for other people. Nouwen explains,

Compassion is born when we discover in the center of our own existence, not only that God is God and humans are human, but also that our neighbor really is our fellow human being. Through compassion it is possible to recognize that the craving for love that people feel resides also in our own hearts, that cruelly the world knows all too well is also rooted in our own impulses.²⁸

Compassion for others helps to create the open and safe space necessary to offer the gift of consciousness to others. Several activities had been engaged to offer this gift to others.

The first activity was a twelve-week women's group study on prayer conducted during Fall 2018. At the time, this was done as a leader in the women's ministry of the church. This position afforded the opportunity to create and lead this study. To aid the study, the group utilized the book, *Fervent: A Woman's Battle Plan for Serious, Specific, and Strategic Prayer*, by Priscilla Shirer. The members read a chapter from the book

28. Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Image Doubleday, 2010), 45.

prior to the meeting and engaged in the prayer strategy suggestions in the chapter.

Meetings began with *lectio Divina*, utilizing the “Our Father” prayer, followed by a time of reflection. Then, the women would separate into their designated small groups to discuss what they learned in the chapter. At the end of the meeting, they would have the opportunity to wander around the church campus for a time of solitude and silent prayer. During the last meeting, the room where the group met was set up for a time of worship and prayer. The first part of the meeting was designed for the women to engage in praise and worship through singing. The church’s worship leader led the women through several songs, after which they were released to partake in the various prayer stations that had been set up around the room. Each prayer station was labeled with a specific theme for prayer, and there were small notepads and pens for the women to write out prayers so that other women could pray over them.

The second activity involved spiritual direction sessions with directees, which began in May 2020. The meetings were held via online video conferencing due to concerns regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. To keep the two directees’ identities confidential, they are referred to as Directee A and Directee B.

Directee A was a thirty-five-year-old female. She was a high school graduate who did not attend college. She had a variety of jobs since high school, including being self-employed as a hair braider for about ten years. She had been married for twelve years and had an eleven-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son. She no longer worked outside the home but continued to be self-employed as a hair braider as well as a personal trainer. These jobs allowed her to spend time at home with her children since she planned her

own work schedule. Due to the Covid-19 quarantine, her oldest daughter had been participating in remote learning at home during school hours.

In her birth family, she had four siblings, two of whom had the same mother and father as she. She was the middle child and the oldest daughter in this combination. Her other two siblings had the same father as her but a different mother. Her family was of Caribbean descent; her grandparents were immigrants. She considered herself a spiritual person, but, currently, did not attend church regularly. She had periods where she was regularly attending church, but several moves and life transitions caused her to have to find new places of worship. She had not yet found one where she felt nourished. She was excited about participating in spiritual direction, wanting to regain some of the spirituality she had when she was attending a church she liked and attended regularly. She also wanted to overcome some issues she was currently having in her life as well as experience some spiritual growth. During the initial spiritual direction session in May, Directee A agreed to meet twice a month for one-hour sessions.

Directee B was a forty-five-year-old male. He was a high school graduate who did not attend college. He had a variety of jobs since high school, most of which had been in the audio-visual departments of local television news stations. Outside of this work, he has pursued entrepreneurial businesses in marketing, documentary filmmaking, and personal training. At the time, he was working in an administrative position as a project manager for a construction firm. He had divorced his first wife of ten years about twelve years prior and was living with his fiancé, their four-year-old daughter, and his fiancé's thirteen-year-old son and fifteen-year-old daughter. In his family of origin, he had one older sister. His mother had died fourteen years prior. Before her death, she suffered from

autoimmune hepatitis, and she also was diagnosed with bi-polar schizophrenic that resulted in two extended hospitalizations in mental wards. His father lived alone in another state. He agreed to have virtual sessions once a month.

The objective of the first few months of sessions was to create a safe and open environment for vulnerability during the sessions. There was some difficulty doing this in an online format as the participants were unable to be completely alone in their environments. Being new to spiritual direction and not being avid churchgoers, it was necessary to take things slow, so there would not be the feeling of being pressured into spiritual practices. Also, added stress and pressure already existed due to the pandemic and the unrest in the country due to social justice and racial issues. HGST courses on multiculturalism had offered knowledge and language on how to address their feelings on racial trauma.²⁹

During this introductory period, most of the time was spent simply learning to listen to God and reflect on life. The intention was to bring awareness to God's presence and work in daily life. The conversation generally would revolve around relationships since more time was being spent confined to the home with family members due to the pandemic. The only spiritual practice that was offered at this point was journaling. Directees were instructed to consider the thoughts and issues that arose during the meeting and journal about them. During the next time together, any insights gained from the journaling was discussed. Journaling allowed for growth in listening to God and his movement in daily life as well as growth in discernment of his will. Journaling became a

29. Sheila Wise Rowe, *Healing Racial Trauma: The Road to Resilience* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 9-10, Kindle.

consistent spiritual practice that was done throughout the year. This task was not performed perfectly as sometimes it was not done. The director held lightly her accountability, so they did not feel harassed and turned off from engaging in spiritual direction.

After about three months, the mode of spiritual direction had been established with participants feeling comfortable, vulnerable, and accessible. There was an increased awareness of God's presence and ability to listen to him. The sessions were becoming deeper and more introspective. The time was right to add the spiritual practices of solitude and silence.

The spiritual director advised the directees to make time in their schedules for solitude and silence. These concepts were new and somewhat foreign to their active lives. Their shared belief was that being successful required constant doing. In addition, they both had young families that required a lot of attention. The suggestion was to start small by trying to delineate just five minutes, possibly at the beginning of the day. Incorporating this spiritual practice required patience and compassion. The directees found it difficult to make the time. After several failed attempts, the suggestion was made to think of these practices differently. The director had learned from the retreats she had participated in that one could experience silence and solitude amid others. Instead of focusing on being separated from people with no sound, solitude and silence could be sought in spaces with other people. This suggestion helped. Directee A found that, as a personal trainer, she could go to the gym prior to her family waking up and spend some time working out alone with the assistance of noise cancellation headphones. Directee B carved out time by walking the dog, working out in his garage, or mowing the lawn. By

revamping the concepts of solitude and silence, these times became easier and quite precious. These became regular practices for the rest of the year.

With increased receptivity, the notions of false self and true self were introduced at about six months. With the aid of spiritual practices, each directee began to recognize and define their false self and their true self. This recognition intensified their desire for growth and transformation. At this point, BFST and the Enneagram were presented.

Utilizing BFST, the presence of anxiety in the family of origin was considered. Directee A immediately grasped her role in her family of origin as well as her extended family. She recognized how strong the togetherness force was and how she had fused with others. As a result of this information, Directee A became more assertive in her family of origin and began to establish boundaries in her relationships. She strived to become more self-differentiated. Directee B was not as receptive to discussing his role or the anxiety present in the family. This topic was tabled until he was ready to dig deeper. However, both directees found an interest in exploring the family diagram. They discovered some traits in their families that were passed down through the generations. This made them aware of things they were doing to reinforce these traits. The awareness motivated them to want to change.

To discover Enneagram type, several free online tests were taken. Typing Directee A was difficult as her type was different on every test. In discussing this with Directee A, it was noted that the test questions were being answered based on perception of self rather than real self. More time had to be spent in exploration. This exploration moved beyond tests into discussion about behaviors and motivations. Even though a definitive type was not assigned, the discovery and discussion process increased Directee

A's knowledge of self. Directee B's Enneagram type was easier to uncover as it was consistent across the various tests. The discovery of type helped in the understanding of his unconscious behaviors and motivations. It also offered tools for transformation of self and growth in relationships.

By the end of the year, the spiritual direction participants experienced growth and transformation of self as a result of the sessions. The directees decided to continue having sessions with the director for the foreseeable future. In the future, the director hopes to be able to invite the directees to engage in stillness through centering prayer. She also hopes that, over time, she will be able to assist them in formulating a Rule of Life.

Shortly after the spiritual direction sessions began, supervision meetings were scheduled with the spiritual formation/direction specialization professor and the chosen spiritual director. During several sessions with the professor, the director expressed concerns regarding her ability to be a good spiritual director. One concern was difficulty refraining from offering advice or making judgments about the things discussed, primarily because of familiarity with the directees. A few minor issues were also discussed that came up during the sessions. The professor offered guidance based on his experience as a spiritual director. He also offered advice regarding how to conduct the sessions including how to start them and how to bring them to a close. Discussions with the chosen spiritual director about these sessions were much more frequent, along with the ability to discuss things during their monthly meetings. Despite feelings of inadequacy doing the job, surprise was expressed to the professor and spiritual director about how engaged the directees were and how they always showed up for their sessions. After several months, with the encouragement of the professor and spiritual director,

realization came that it was the false self that was judging and questioning the calling to be a spiritual director. They helped bring understanding that the reaction of the directees was the true affirmation of the calling and that, ultimately, the Holy Spirit oversaw the sessions, not the person in the role.

The final activity was an online prayer retreat that took place over a seven-week period during the season of Lent 2021. It began on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and ended on Easter Sunday. There were six directee participants in this online retreat, and the group met for approximately one hour on Sundays during the seven-week period. The group was assigned to read three chapters from the Gospel of John each week. The members were given a blank planner prior to the start of the retreat, the intention of which was for the participants to engage in reflection by recording their daily activities as well as the Examen. They were to reflect on the day and write down the things that made their lives feel full, as well as the things that seemed to drain their lives. They were also given the spiritual practices of self-reflection through journaling and spending time in solitude and silence daily. The Sunday meeting would begin with *lectio Divina* using a set of verses found in the chapters that were assigned from the Gospel of John. After reflecting on the verses, the participants discussed their weekly activities and whatever had come up for them that week. The overall vision for the prayer retreat was for the participants to become aware of the ways in which God operated in their daily lives as well as for them to begin to create a regular pattern of daily prayer and reflection. At the conclusion of the retreat, the participants communicated that they appreciated the experience and felt it had helped them in their spiritual growth. All of the participants had learned some new things about themselves, especially those things that bring them joy.

These understandings gave several of them clues to those things that God had created for them to do. None of them, however, established a regular, consistent prayer routine, but they all became more active in their spiritual lives.

While becoming conscious through training and gifting consciousness to others by leading various spiritual activities, increasing awareness of the strength of the false self emerged. Also realized was the depth of the need for transformation. The next chapter explores whether the projected outcomes of these activities were achieved as outlined in the first chapter.

Chapter IV

Outcomes of Spiritual Direction Praxis

The desired outcomes for the spiritual direction sessions were considered before others were invited to participate. Primarily, what was envisioned was that both director and directees would experience transformation of self through their cooperative work in these sessions. This transformation would occur through the healing of mental, emotional, and spiritual wounds, and the cleansing of unproductive habits and behaviors as well as through overall spiritual growth. For this transformation to occur, an atmosphere of openness and comfort or, as Nouwen suggested, a “sacred space” needed to be cultivated.¹ This kind of atmosphere allows directees to feel safe enough to be vulnerable about their weaknesses and failures as well as examine their strengths and successes. This atmosphere also permits the spiritual director and directees to be open to listening to God. It lays the foundation for them to actively engage in in their personal journeys of spiritual formation. Having gone through the appropriate training as outlined in the previous chapter, there was a sense of readiness to create this type of atmosphere.

Over the course of the year conducting spiritual direction sessions, the sessions were tracked and analyzed according to three areas of focus to determine whether the appropriate atmosphere was cultivated and to determine the participants’ level of transformation. These three areas of focus were the spiritual director’s temperament, the

1. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, xv.

experience of the session, and the needs of the directees. The following is a review of the outcomes associated with these three areas.²

The first area of focus to be tracked and analyzed was the spiritual director's temperament. The projected outcome of this focus was for the director to achieve a growing sense of wholeness through healing, cleansing, and growth. This growing sense of wholeness would help to keep the sessions free from obstacles. These obstacles would involve the director's personal issues, beliefs, and opinions. Such obstacles would hinder the creation of an open and comforting atmosphere.

There was recognition that to achieve this outcome, engaging in spiritual practices that would address her whole person would be needed—body, soul, mind, and spirit. Prior to the start of the sessions with the directees, time was spent thinking about how to arrange these four areas of personhood to engage in spiritual practices that would be impactful for each area. The arrangement created was based on the general strategy for transformation that was discussed in Chapter III. The spiritual practices designated for the body were practices that correlated with the temporal and physical nature of the body, including maintaining a consistent schedule of nutrition/exercise/rest, spending time in solitude, following a Rule of Life, and engaging in regular play. The soul and mind are both parts of the individual that represent the self that one presents to the world. As such, these two parts were grouped together regarding their assigned spiritual practices. For these areas, the assigned practices were engaging in creative activities, spending time in silence, and regular journaling as well as practicing *lectio Divina* and the *Examen*. The spirit is the aspect of the person that communes with God. The practices necessary for

2 . See Appendices A, B, and C for Outcome Tracking Form and insights.

this communication were engaging in centering prayer and worship and spending time in stillness. To review the effect that all of these practices were having on the whole person, regular meetings were set with the personal spiritual director as well as the spiritual direction supervisor.

A chart was created to track engagement with these spiritual practices monthly. After reviewing the chart, progress was analyzed in growing in wholeness using a Likert scale. In general, there was consistency in spiritual practices that were in the body area. It had not been a problem creating a routine way of life in which to engage the body. Unfortunately, there was difficulty in maintaining a consistent practice in the other areas. When reflecting on these inconsistencies, the realization came that the inability to engage in practices in those areas was directly related to levels of stress and anxiety. With calm and a peaceful state internally came the ability to joyfully engage in those practices. Regrettably, when feeling stressed and/or anxious, the only activities that could be maintained were those associated with the body.

As mentioned, there were numerous social challenges occurring in the country during the year of conducting spiritual direction sessions. These challenges had a direct impact on mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In addition to the worldwide pandemic and the national political and social issues were the responsibilities of having all of the kids at home engaging in remote learning during the several weeks of mandatory statewide quarantine during the initial months of the pandemic. Then, after the quarantine receded, the two oldest children had to be sent off to their respective colleges. Their send-off denoted the beginning of a mournful occasion that marked them moving into adulthood. With this came the realization that they probably would never be living at

home again. Furthermore, there was concern for their safety because of the pandemic and the political and social issues facing the country. As if these circumstances were not enough, there were several hurricanes and a winter storm that also caused concern for their safety.

With growing in consciousness came understanding of the false self and its pattern of protection. Ironically, the false self was protected through fearfulness and overthinking stressful situations. In a strange way, the fear appeared to be wisdom as it formed a barrier that offered a shield from the dangers of the outside world. The fear caused a frantic search for solutions to issues in the safety of familiar and comfortable spaces. This search often involved delving deep into knowledge as well as searching for new knowledge through thinking and study. The mind would go into overdrive, and the fear combined with overthinking resulted in an increase in anxiety. With increased anxiety levels came numbness to external and her internal environments. The numbness caused a sense of shutting down and distancing from the surrounding world. Interaction with others was not desired, sometimes including her family.

The false self then asserted itself over the will to be the envisioned type of spiritual director. It prevented consistently engaging in those spiritual practices that would cause its destruction. Strong feelings of resistance arose when the time to engage in a spiritual practice approached. Sometimes the resistance caused a response of doing nothing. At other times, the resistance caused engagement in distracting activities.

Every month, a Likert scale was used to review any growing sense of wholeness. According to the way the analysis of this first outcome had been set up, the feeling was that not much growth was being experienced. In fact, there was a feeling of moving

backwards in this area. Guilt and a sense of shame were felt for not being the type of spiritual director that the prior decision had determined was needed. During the first few spiritual direction sessions with directees, there was a sense of being a fraud who gave suggestions for spiritual practices that personally could not fully be followed.

Toward the end of the year came a chance to analyze the entirety of the experience. The realization was that even though growth had not been in the way envisioned at the beginning of the sessions, unexpected growth had still been experienced. Through all the various forms of training undertaken, much had been learned, especially about the false self and true self. The realization came that what was being done was exactly what was needed to be done for the current place on the spiritual journey. The guiding spiritual director provided insights into the combination of all that had been experienced personally that year, which had been traumatizing, so there was need to have personal compassion. This compassion was the same kind that would be offered to directees wherever they were on their spiritual formation journeys. So, although the envisioned way of growth in wholeness at the start of the year did not happen, there was still healing, cleansing, and growth in different ways. The biggest point of transformation was being able to see differently, such as seeing all of life as prayer, so that it did not have to be done in a specific way at a specific time. Instead, it was about the intention and willingness to be open to God's transformative work in one's life.

At one point in the year, visualizing the false and true selves as two separate people began. When sensing that the false self was in full charge of life, a conversation with it would be held. Sometimes, apologies would be made for having all of the responsibility of protecting self and appreciation would be expressed for taking care of

self for all these years. This experience was humbling, but it allowed the release of some of the expectations of the directees and their progress.

The second area of focus was the experience of the spiritual direction sessions. The projected outcome of this focus was for both director and directee to experience an open and comforting atmosphere during spiritual direction sessions. To cultivate this type of atmosphere, it was necessary to enter into these sessions self-aware of position and posture. Regarding position, it was understood that the leader of the sessions was the Holy Spirit, which meant conducting the sessions under the authority and direction of the Holy Spirit, so that the directee would not be judged or advised. This position required maintaining a non-anxious presence during the sessions, as well as a distraction-free environment that would allow the directee to remain present both physically and mentally during the entirety of the session. With the Holy Spirit leading the sessions, the director recognized that speaking would only be done when impressed by the Spirit. The position was as a mediator, whose task was to translate the communication that was transpiring between the Holy Spirit and the directee when necessary.

The position as mediator was tied directly to posture. This posture was one of prayerful listening, a form of spiritual discernment that involved three primary actions. First, there was an intentional introduction of moments of silence in the session. Silence allowed maintaining a connection to the Spirit and keeping the false self from trying to interject judgment or advice into the conversation. Silence kept the space between the Holy Spirit and the directee open for communication, allowing for both director and directee to listen to the Holy Spirit. Second, attention was paid to the directee's words, both spoken and unspoken, as well as body language. By paying attention to these things,

clues were gleaned to what might be transpiring within the directee, of which they may not have been conscious. Paying attention was a way of listening to the directee. The final action and way of listening to the directee was to ask open-ended questions.³ These types of questions allowed the directee to go deep within to seek what the true self and the Holy Spirit were saying before responding.

To measure the outcome related to the participants' experience of the sessions, the sessions were reviewed monthly, using Likert scales, which measured the ability to maintain the designated position and posture. The Likert scales were labeled silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement. After reviewing progress over several months, consistency in all five areas was the goal. In addition to the Likert scales as a means of analyzing the experiences, journaling recorded the directees' reactions to the sessions. By journaling, the focus was on the directees' areas of cooperation and areas of resistance. Surprisingly, even though both directees had never participated in anything like spiritual direction before, they were both quite receptive to everything that occurred. Both directees were cooperative during the sessions and open to the spiritual practices they were encouraged to try. When reflecting on how well everyone had done regarding the experience of the sessions, the length of the relationship with both directees had to be considered. Directee A had been known for at least fifteen years and Directee B had been known for all of his life. These long-term relationships may have made it easier to cultivate the experience of an open and comforting atmosphere. The false self may have refrained from stepping up because of the comfort of conversing with familiar directees.

3. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, loc 1330–3, Kindle.

Future research will show whether results will be the same when working with directees who are not as well known.

The third area of focus was the needs of the directees. The projected outcome of this focus was to exhibit Spirit-led discernment regarding the directees' needs by offering appropriate suggestions for spiritual practices. This type of discernment required maintaining an open mind about the direction of encounters with directees. Over the course of several sessions, a sense was developed regarding different areas of investigation and practice for the directees to explore. These areas were not approached, however, unless it was felt that the Spirit was leading to do so. The belief was that the Spirit would provide insights into these areas during the meetings with the directees and that the appropriate time to suggest this course of action would arrive through a posture of prayerful listening. At times, the Spirit would direct the introduction of a spiritual practice during a session.

Notes were maintained on the directees' responses to suggestions. At the end of the month, Likert scales were used to measure their responses and to gauge whether the new actions could become regular practices. The directees were found to be enthusiastic about the suggestions made. There were a few occasions where they did not follow through in performing a practice; however, those occasions were usually related to a lack of understanding about the practice or a lack of time. However, it did become easy for them to make these suggestions regular practices. In the same manner that personal issues with the false self often prevented certain things from becoming regular practices for the director, the directees had similar issues of personal obstacles keeping them from making these practices regular.

Upon reviewing all of the outcomes together, the importance of the Holy Spirit to the spiritual direction session was fully realized. The previous vision of a perfect spiritual director without flaws and wounds became much less significant over the course of the project. Rather, intention and surrender became most important to the sessions as was evidenced by the directees' responses. The report will now turn to conclusions reached and insights gained through the process.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Spiritual direction is a form of contemplative prayer. Unlike therapy or counseling, this process is not about diagnosing or fixing an issue. It is not about thinking, analyzing, or planning but about placing oneself in the presence of God in faith and opening oneself to the contents of the unconscious.¹ Keating describes contemplative prayer as

a deepening of faith that moves beyond thoughts and concepts. One just listens to God, open and receptive to the divine presence in one's inmost being as its source. One listens, not with a view to hearing something, but with a view to becoming aware of the obstacles to one's friendship with God. Contemplative prayer starts modestly, but as soon as it begins to reach a certain intensity, it opens us to the unconscious.²

As a form of contemplative prayer, spiritual direction is about building an intimate connection with God. In an open and safe space, the practice opens participants up to listening to God and to their true self. The spiritual director

helps the other to address God directly and to listen to what God has to communicate. The focus of this kind of spiritual direction is the relationship itself between God and the person. The person is helped, not so much to understand the relationship better, but to engage in it, to enter into dialogue with God. Spiritual direction of this kind focuses on what happens when a person listens to and responds to a self-communicating God.³

1. Keating, *Human Condition*, loc. 129–32, Kindle.

2 . Ibid., loc, 176, Kindle.

3 . Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 7, Kindle.

This is not a one-sided interaction with a professional advising a client; instead, it is a practice where both the director and directee are impacted.

As defined by Nouwen, spiritual directors are wounded healers. They can view being a wounded healer as a gift, a gift of hospitality. As Nouwen points out, hospitality is a willingness to open one's home to strangers. This home is not the individual's physical home, but it is the home of the heart—which space includes the wounds. While this hospitality has healing power, “it requires first of all [that] the hosts feel at home in their own house, and, second, that they create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor.”⁴ To create this place of safety and peace for visitors to unload their burdens, directors should be comfortable with what is in their homes. This comfort comes through knowing themselves well, through which process of discovery the wounds are bound through the healing presence and love of God. When they allow the home of their heart to be rearranged according to God's will, they will create a space for the other. This space will be like a comfortable living room where the other can feel peace and safety. Wounded healers must confront their own pains of life, so that they will not be trying to fix another. They simply will be offering them a place of communal comfort in the home of their heart because they compassionately understand their suffering.

Spiritual direction is not about providing answers for others; they cannot heal others. All they can do is create a space—a space of understanding the pain of the human experience, a space where others feel safe to reveal their wounds. In that space, God sits with the wounded healer and the suffering one. As they sit together, the healing takes place. In the healing, the wounded healer and the suffering one experience an exchange

4. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 95-96.

of healing. As the suffering one experiences healing, the wounded healer experiences further healing. The suffering one then can pass his or her experience onto other suffering people. Nonetheless, by making those wounds visible and binding them as they attend to others, they are being like Jesus in his incarnation and in his redemption of the world.

During spiritual direction training and the offering of spiritual direction sessions, a distinctive paradigm was developed that spiritual direction is a personalized experience. Spiritual direction is not a one-size-fits-all type of spiritual discipline. Everyone grows and transforms in his or her own unique way; therefore, there cannot be any preplanned methodology or manual. There is a heavy reliance on the Holy Spirit's intervention. There is freedom in that perspective for the spiritual director as well as the directee. The freedom for the spiritual director is that one does not have to know everything or be the perfect spiritual director. Spiritual direction can be offered from the perspective of acceptance of oneself and one's directee, two flawed and wounded individuals seeking God. It offers freedom for directees because they will not feel pressured to be perfect either. This freedom will allow them to accept themselves and where they are on their spiritual journeys. It will also allow them to be free to participate in the process authentically. With both the director and directee understanding that God is working in their midst, they can, in faith, rely on the fact that God is foundationally working things out for them.

In addition to this distinctive paradigm, it was learned that transformational spiritual formation is more nuanced than the rote practice of spiritual disciplines and following a particular moral code as prescribed by past church authorities. These were things that had been taught in over twenty years of church leadership. However, these

methods of spiritual formation led to external piety without internal transformation. In contrast, transformational spiritual formation is about one's identity in Christ. It is about becoming the unique, true self that God created. David Benner explains,

Christian spirituality has a great deal to do with the self, not just with God. The goal of the spiritual journey is the transformation of self. . . . This requires knowing both our self and God. Both are necessary if we are to discover our true identity as those who are 'in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:17), because the self is where we meet God. Both are also necessary if we are to live out the uniqueness of our vocation.⁵

He further attests, "Nothing is more important, for if we find our true self we find God, and if we find God, we find our most authentic self."⁶ Jesus is the ultimate example of this type of identity resulting from an understanding of his true self. He "demonstrated the capacity to remain connected to others and yet to teach and live by deeply held principles, even when the anxiety and relationship pressure grew intense. This ability is what Murray Bowen labeled 'differentiation of self.'"⁷

Also gained was a greater compassion for self and directees. It was realized through difficulties in adhering to the initial plan of spiritual practices that "the transformational journey [was] not as linear" as expected.⁸ The pandemic, racial injustice issues, quarantine, virtual learning, and political issues all compounding in one year exposed underlying motivations and subconscious ways of coping with anxiety. It was discovered how trauma was dealt with by becoming more proficient in the Enneagram. Compassionate learning helped to accept limitations. For mental health, things were

5. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 13, Kindle.

6. Ibid., 15, Kindle.

7. Creech, *Family Systems*, 92.

8. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 18, Kindle.

approached in a way that felt real and right. Spiritual practices loosened and were simplified. It was acknowledged that the best was all anyone could give in the way that felt best at the time.

This acceptance of limitations brought about the realization that the way in which training, learning, and practice transpired during the practicum was exactly the right way it needed to be. All of these experiences, good and bad, were necessary to grow in consciousness. It was also necessary for growth in humility, wisdom, discernment, and compassion that allowed for becoming vulnerable and receptive during spiritual direction sessions. The false self was moved out of the way and the Holy Spirit was allowed to have his way. This way of being had a positive impact on both the directees and their families.

The directees vocally expressed how the spiritual direction sessions benefitted them directly and their families indirectly. Prior to starting spiritual direction, Directee B claimed to be Christian, but he had attended church only sparingly during his adult life. He had never actively participated in any spiritual disciplines. He did not have any experience in Christian spiritual formation. Spiritual direction introduced him to a gentle, yet direct way of engaging in spiritual disciplines. He learned of various ways to pray and attend to the presence of God in his life. As a result, he began to pray and read scripture. He spent time reflecting on his life, feelings, and thoughts. He felt a deeper connection to God because his spiritual direction experience was personalized. Over time, his humility increased as he began to see his life differently. He complained less and became more grateful. He also became more compassionate and less angry toward his family. His change in view allowed him to propose to his girlfriend. With the assistance of his

physician, he was able to wean himself off of his ADHD medication, which had become more of a crutch than an aid. He also became more committed to pursuing the life he wanted to live.

Unlike Directee B, Directee A had a more active spiritual life of regular church attendance and the practice of spiritual disciplines. She had found, however, that her church involvement had not been fulfilling. She was ready to move to a deeper level of intimacy with God. She willingly engaged in the spiritual disciplines and activities that were recommended. She was open about her life. She reflected deeply on God's participation in her life. In her reflections, she recognized some things about herself that were holding her back from living the life she desired. As she moved forward in her practice and her reflection, she became bolder. She was able to speak her mind with authenticity when faced with conflict. She established boundaries with her family and her clients, especially with those individuals whom she believed took advantage of her kind nature. She started to pursue her passions more vehemently, realizing that she should value herself and her desires for her life. These changes in the way she lived her life improved her relationships with her family, especially her husband.

Finally, at home, informal spiritual direction was offered to husband and children. They had times of practicing *lectio Divina* and the *Examen*. They practiced growing in consciousness and in their awareness of God's activity in their lives. They also participated in the prayer retreat. A byproduct of the involvement with both directees and family was the transmission of the things they learned to others. In a casual manner, they related conversations that they had about something gained through spiritual direction. This informal spiritual direction was a form of discipleship. It offered the possibility for

transformation and growth to more people. It became evident that spiritual direction not only transformed their lives but had a lasting effect on how they proceeded in living their lives. Unlike church attendance, which for some becomes just a chore to check off one's to-do list, spiritual direction is a lifestyle that has a long-term influence. It is exciting to already see the impact that continued growth in spiritual direction will have to director and directees personally and in the lives of those who will be influenced positively in the future.

Appendix A
Outcomes Tracking Form

Outcomes Tracking Form

I. Outcome One:

A. Maintain a chart of the regular exercise of spiritual practices by the spiritual director which address the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit

Body	Soul and Mind	Spirit
Nutrition/Exercise/Rest	Creativity	Stillness
Solitude	Silence	Centering Prayer
Rule of Life	Lectio Divina	Worship
Play	Examen of Consciousness	
	Journaling	

B. Journal reflection on the spiritual director's spiritual practices:

C. Likert scale measuring spiritual director's growing sense of wholeness

1. Wholeness: _____
 no growth little growth some growth large growth

II. Outcome Two:

A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date:

1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

a. Resistance:

b. Cooperation:

2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

1. Silence: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

2. Listening: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

3. Discernment: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

4. Focus: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

5. Engagement: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

2. Spiritual Direction Directee B (Female/30s)—session dates:

1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

a. Resistance:

b. Cooperation:

2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

1. Silence: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

2. Listening: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

3. Discernment: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

4. Focus: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

5. Engagement: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

III. Outcome Three:

A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date:

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions: _____
no response small response some response large response

b. Movement to a regular practice: _____
no move small move some move large move

B. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Female/30s)—session dates:

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions: _____
no response small response some response large response

b. Movement to a regular practice: _____
no move small move some move large move

Appendix B

Selection of Actual Outcomes Tracking Forms

Selection of Actual Outcomes Tracking Forms

May 2020

I. Outcome One:

A. Maintain a chart of the regular exercise of spiritual practices by the spiritual director

which address the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit

Body	Soul and Mind	Spirit
Nutrition/Exercise/Rest Regularly exercised at least 4 mornings a week. Took vitamins and supplements almost daily Obtained at least 6-7 hours sleep nightly	Creativity Daily creatively cultivated a stress-free environment for the family.	Stillness Unable to engage in because of internal anxieties about the current climate of the country.
Solitude Early morning alone time as much as possible with all the kids at home during quarantine.	Silence Early morning quiet time as much as possible with all the kids at home during quarantine.	Centering Prayer Unable to engage in because of internal anxieties about the current climate of the country.
Rule of Life Weekdays Morning: Wake up routine, light candles around the house, listen to worship music, solitude & silence once kids start class Rest of the day: engage in various types of work until dinner Evening: Cook dinner while listening to feel-good music, Dinner and relaxing activities, Night-time routine Weekends: Wake up routine, light candles around the house, listen to worship music Loose schedule for the day	Lectio Divina Did not partake	Worship Listen to worship music every morning

Saturday evening: Movie with the family Sunday morning: Family gathers for informal family service led by my husband.		
Play With the family: Occasional game night during the week. Movie night on Saturdays. Alone: Work on jigsaw puzzles	Examen of Consciousness Did not partake	
	Journaling Did not partake	

B. Journal reflection on the spiritual director's spiritual practices:

The only spiritual practices that I could do were the ones that brought peace to my body, my soul, and my mind and the ones that I could engage my spirit in a way that did not involve thinking. The quarantine due to Covid-19 which resulted in all of my kids being at home rather than at school in addition to the concerns about getting the virus placed a lot of stress on me and my family. As I am the type of person who can get absorbed in fear and anxiety and who tends to overthink everything, I preferred not to dwell in thoughts. I wanted to create an atmosphere of peace in my household for me and my family. I wanted to have a way for us to get away from the chaos of the world outside of our household. I also wanted us to rely on our faith and not on what our eyes were showing us on the television and social media.

There was a peaceful environment in the household for the majority of the month of May. I actually started to enjoy have everyone at home all of the time. It was nice little

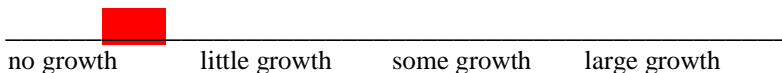
cocoon I had built for my kids to feel safe. They did not seem to mind not being able to attend school or spend time with their friends. They felt protected.

Then, George Floyd, an unarmed African American man, was killed by a White police officer. The entire incident was caught on cell phone video that went viral on social media. The whole incident was upsetting for my family as we are African Americans. I was able to keep most of the information away from my younger children, but my older children were extremely upset about it. We all had friends and family members that went out into the streets for the protests. Various people we knew were leaving protests having experienced both powerful moments of community engagement and moments of police brutality. At the same time, we had White friends who are deeply conservative. The comments that they were making on social media about the protests were disparaging. They served to further anger us about the situation, especially since we felt like they were discrediting our experiences and the experiences of people we know.

At the same time, there was a growing segment of the population, usually connected to the conservative side of the government, that were protesting against the government Covid mandates. There were people refusing to wear masks and stop attending large public gatherings, including some churches. Lines were being drawn among families and friends around these issues. Anger and tensions were boiling over sometimes resulting in viral videos of people attacking each other in public places over differing views about individual rights and public safety. These places of unrest were also among people that were declaring themselves to be Christian and on the side of God. This was hard to explain to the kids, especially since the Jesus we have all we taught them about spoke of loving one's neighbors.

I also experienced some emotion around the end of my son's senior year of high school. Due to the Covid situation, he missed his final track season, signing his national letter of intent to run track at UL, his prom, and his graduation with the corresponding celebratory activities. I was sad about him not getting to have these important moments. He was not as upset as me.

C. Likert scale measuring spiritual director's growing sense of wholeness

1. Wholeness: 

II. Outcome Two:

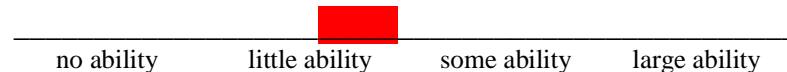
A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date 5/19/2020:

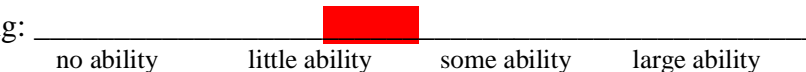
1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

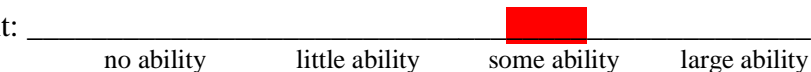
a. Resistance: There was no obvious resistance.


b. Cooperation: The directee was cooperative and open throughout the session. The directee spoke freely about where he is in life. The directee was open to suggestions for spiritual practices to partake in that will be discussed during the next spiritual direction session.


2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

a. Silence: 

b. Listening: 

c. Discernment: 

d. Focus: 

e. Engagement: 

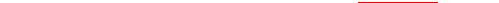
B. Spiritual Direction Directee B (Female/30s)—session date 5/26/2020:

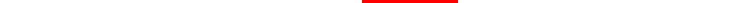
1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

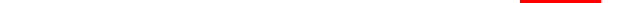
a. Resistance: There was no obvious resistance.

b. Cooperation: The directee was cooperative and open throughout the session. The directee spoke freely about where she is in life. The directee was open to suggestions for spiritual practices to partake in that will be discussed during the next spiritual direction session.

2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

a. Silence: 

b. Listening: 

c. Discernment: 

d. Focus:

no ability	little ability	some ability	large ability
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e. Engagement: _____ _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

III. Outcome Three:

A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date 5/19/2020:

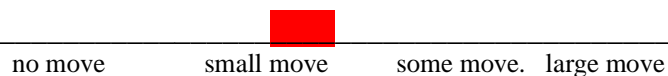
1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published in order to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions:



b. Movement to a regular practice:

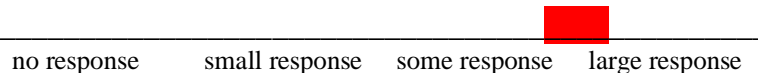


B. Spiritual Direction Directee B (Female/30s)—session date 5/26/2020:

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published in order to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions:



b. Movement to a regular practice:



October 2020


I. Outcome One:

A. Maintain a chart of the regular exercise of spiritual practices by the spiritual director which address the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit

Body	Soul and Mind	Spirit
Nutrition/Exercise/Rest Regularly exercised at least 4 mornings a week. Took vitamins and supplements almost daily Obtained at least 6-7 hours sleep nightly	Creativity	Stillness Yin yoga which involves being in positions in stillness for several minutes. Not a regular practice.
Solitude Early morning alone time as much as possible with the youngest kids at home for remote school.	Silence Early morning quiet time as much as possible with the youngest kids at home for remote school.	Centering Prayer Not exactly centering prayer, but I did some meditative type prayer while working on a puzzle.
Rule of Life Weekdays Morning: Wake up routine, light candles around the house, solitude & silence once kids start class Rest of the day: engage in various types of work until dinner Evening: Cook dinner, Dinner and relaxing activities, Night-time routine Weekends: Wake up routine, light candles around the house Loose schedule for the day Sunday morning: Family gathers for informal family service led by my husband online.	Lectio Divina	Worship
Play Alone: Work on jigsaw puzzles	Examen of Consciousness	
	Journaling	

B. Journal reflection on the spiritual director's spiritual practices: I was in the exact same mode as last month. Nothing has changed. Politics, hurricanes, and worries have me distracted and feeling anxious and upset. I just cannot go beyond the practices that are mentally easy. I was resistant to anything that requires me to step out of my comfort and protection zone. I did not want to talk to anyone or leave the house. My false self was in full control. I was complaining about everything and wanted to quit my degree program.

C. Likert scale measuring spiritual director's growing sense of wholeness

1. Wholeness:  _____
no growth little growth some growth large growth

II. Outcome Two:

A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date: 10/21

1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

a. Resistance: There was no obvious resistance.

b. Cooperation: The directee participated in the assignments given to him and was fully cooperative.


2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

1. Silence: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

2. Listening: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

3. Discernment: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

4. Focus: _____
no ability little ability some ability large ability

5. Engagement: 

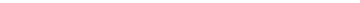
2. Spiritual Direction Directee B (Female/30s)—session dates: 10/2 and 10/16

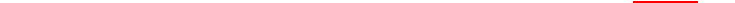
1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

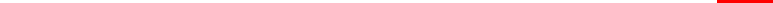
a. Resistance: There was no obvious resistance.

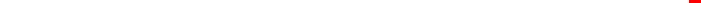
b. Cooperation: The directee participated in the assignments given to her and was fully cooperative.

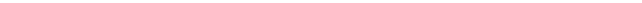
2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

1. Silence: 

2. Listening: 

3. Discernment: 

4. Focus: 

5. Engagement: 

III. Outcome Three:

A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date: 10/21

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published in order to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions: _____
no response small response some response large response

b. Movement to a regular practice: _____
no move small move some move. large move

B. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Female/30s)—session dates:10/2 and 10/16

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published in order to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions: _____
no response small response some response large response

b. Movement to a regular practice: _____
no move small move some move. large move

March 2021

I. Outcome One:

A. Maintain a chart of the regular exercise of spiritual practices by the spiritual director which address the whole person—body, soul, mind, and spirit

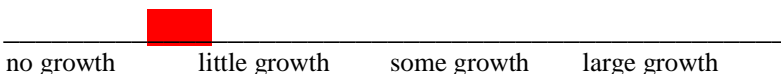
Body	Soul and Mind	Spirit
<p>Nutrition/Exercise/Rest</p> <p>Regularly exercised at least 4 mornings a week.</p> <p>Took vitamins and supplements almost daily</p> <p>Obtained at least 6-7 hours sleep nightly</p>	<p>Creativity</p> <p>Daily creatively cultivated a stress-free environment for the family.</p>	<p>Stillness</p> <p>Yin yoga which involves being in positions in stillness for several minutes. Not a regular practice.</p>

<p>Solitude</p> <p>Early morning alone time as much as possible with all the kids at home during quarantine.</p>	<p>Silence</p> <p>Early morning quiet time as much as possible with all the kids at home during quarantine.</p>	<p>Centering Prayer</p> <p>Not exactly centering prayer, but I did some meditative type prayer while working on a puzzle.</p>
<p>Rule of Life</p> <p>Weekdays Morning: Wake up routine, light candles around the house, solitude & silence once kids start class</p> <p>Rest of the day: engage in various types of work until dinner</p> <p>Evening: Cook dinner, Dinner and relaxing activities, Night-time routine</p> <p>Weekends: Wake up routine, light candles around the house,</p> <p>Loose schedule for the day</p> <p>Sunday morning: Lenten Retreat</p>	<p>Lectio Divina</p> <p>Participate in some, but not on a regular and consistent basis.</p>	<p>Worship</p>
<p>Play</p> <p>Alone: Work on jigsaw puzzles</p>	<p>Examen of Consciousness</p> <p>Almost daily reflections on occurrences that were life draining and those that were life filling</p>	
	<p>Journaling</p> <p>Occasional reflection. Nothing consistent.</p>	

B. Journal reflection on the spiritual director's spiritual practices: I had given the participants in the Lenten Retreat planning journals, so that they could participate in reflection during the time of the retreat. This task helped me to keep better track of my own spiritual practices. I was able to spend time daily in reflection. I found the practice kept me focused and gave me a sense of peace. I think the peace came from fulfilling a promise to God and to myself that I would connect with Him daily. In addition, having

the accountability and responsibility of others kept me on track. However, when life became stressful and the motivation of the participants began to wane, I started to fall into my old habits of slacking off of my practices. Then, I felt guilt and shame about the fall-off. Stress and spirituality do not work together for me. I understand that spirituality brings peace, but it seems my way of being is the other way around – peace brings spirituality. Even though I enjoyed conducting the retreat and participating in spiritual growth with others, I am in need of a lot of emotional, mental, and spiritual healing.

C. Likert scale measuring spiritual director's growing sense of wholeness

1. Wholeness: 

II. Outcome Two:

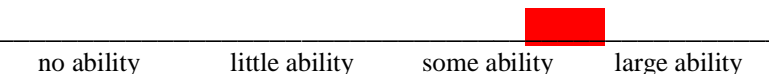
A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date:3/5/2021

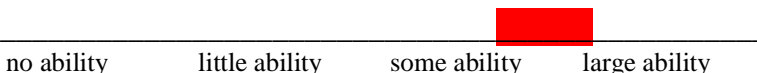
1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

a. Resistance: There was no obvious resistance.

b. Cooperation: Although the directee is generally cooperative with the assignments given, I am noticing a pattern of deflection. He wants to talk a lot about others in his life. When he is confronted directly with himself, he quickly turns the conversation to others.

2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

1. Silence: 

2. Listening: 

3. Discernment: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

4. Focus: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

5. Engagement: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

2. Spiritual Direction Directee B (Female/30s)—session dates:3/5/2021 & 3/29/2021

1. Journal reflection on areas of resistance and areas of cooperation of the spiritual direction directees during the spiritual direction session:

a. Resistance: There was no obvious resistance.

b. Cooperation: The directee was cooperative about the assignments given to her.

2. Likert scales measuring the spiritual director's ability to engage in silence, listening, discernment, focus, and engagement during the spiritual direction sessions with the directee

1. Silence: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

2. Listening: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

3. Discernment: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

4. Focus: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

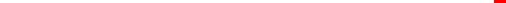
5. Engagement: _____
 no ability little ability some ability large ability

III. Outcome Three:

A. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Male/40s)—session date:3/5/2021

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published in order to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

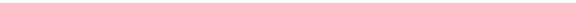
a. Responses to suggestions: 

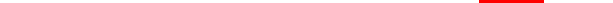
b. Movement to a regular practice:

B. Spiritual Direction Directee A (Female/30s)—session dates:3/5/2021 & 3/29/2021

1. Maintain notes on directee's responses to spiritual practice suggestions offered to the directee by the spiritual director: Notes will not be published in order to maintain directee's confidentiality.

2. Likert scales measuring directee's responses to the spiritual director's suggestions for spiritual practices and gauge directee's movement toward establishing a regular practice

a. Responses to suggestions: 

b. Movement to a regular practice: 

Appendix C

Selection of Entries from the Spiritual Direction Journal of the Director

**Selection of Entries from the Spiritual Direction
Journal of the Director**

October 17, 2018

Even though I felt extremely comfortable with Susan on the phone, I was still pretty anxious prior to our meeting. I just don't like new experiences. Correction, I don't mind new experiences. I just don't like the ones where I have no point of reference. Unfortunately, I didn't find any reviews online about her, so I felt like I was walking into this situation blind.

When I met Susan, all of my anxieties went away. She was down-to-earth and pleasant. She was welcoming and went out her way to make sure I did feel comfortable. Since I had to fill out a form about myself prior to our meeting, she already knew a little bit about me, so she greeted me like we had met before.

Her spiritual direction work is done out of the Sugarland FUMC, so we met in the chapel that they have on the campus. It was a beautiful setting that aided in my relaxation. It is a small chapel with about five rows of seats and a small altar at the front. Behind the altar is a large stained-glass image of Jesus. Along the walls are various, abstract type paintings. We chose to leave the lights off and just let the sunlight stream in as our source of light. It was kind of what I had imagined the ideal spiritual direction setting would be.

We started our session just communicating about ourselves and getting to know each other. She has been a spiritual director for a number of years. She was trained at the Cenacle and also offers spiritual direction through their program. She has had her own spiritual director for about thirty years. She has been a member of her church for over twenty-five years. Her spiritual direction and her yoga as prayer classes are under the

church's recreation department. I must say I found that odd. But that just reflects the contemporary church's concept of where spiritual formation should be placed in the church. Such a shame that this large church does not realize the value of the spiritual life. But that made me think about my position in my current large church. They had a new building built recently by Samaritan's Purse. Samaritan's Purse has taken up residence at the church since Hurricane Harvey to aid in the recovery process. The building they built has a commercial kitchen, two sleeping areas, showers, offices, and a large open space. Someone suggested to me that the space would be a perfect place to have a spiritual direction/retreat ministry. Um, God would have to move on the powers in charge to make that happen. They are more interested in numbers and programs. Anyway, I digress.

After telling Susan about some of my background, I informed her that part of the reason I was there was because of my journey to become a spiritual director. She thought that was cool and said that she will offer to me whatever she had.

Susan then asked me what I was dealing with right now. I told her that that at this time I am trying to learn to let go and be more disciplined. I told her that I had created a Rule of Life for myself over the Summer, but I haven't been able to be consistent with it. I am kind of starting and stopping. I believe it would be good for me to order my life around, but for some reason I can't quite commit to it consistently. Sometimes I just don't want to and other times I get distracted. I used to think that I was more disciplined than that. I never figured it would be hard for me to stick to a plan that I know would benefit me, especially for the direction I want my life to go.

As we talked, we discussed self-care. In our discussion, the Spirit pressed upon me how I feel guilty about self-care, especially since I don't have a 9-to-5 job. Since I am

at home the majority of the time, it kind of feels like I don't deserve self-care. Maybe somehow that is translating to the Rule of Life because right now I am choosing to make it a tool to beat myself up with. For some reason, I choose not to do it and then beat myself up for choosing not to do it. It is such a weird cycle of knowing what is good for you and doing something else. I guess I'm similar to Paul in that respect. Of course, Susan talked to me about God's love and care. She said I needed to make space for God. She said that space did not to be anything outside of my ordinary day to day. She said it was about perspective, about seeing life around me differently. She asked me about a place when I feel most annoyed or hurried. I told her the grocery store. She told me to rethink my trips to the grocery store and begin to see them as moments of encountering God. She told me to take the time to notice everything around me. Ok. I get what she was going for, but is that something I could really do? I never go to the grocery store with the intention of taking my time. I despise going to the grocery store. I would order online, but I don't trust anybody to pick out my groceries for me. When I go the grocery, I try to avoid people, especially people I know. Yes, I am one of those people that hides from people I know at the grocery store. She wants me to do the opposite. I'll consider it, but I think that I would to be on a different spiritual plane than my current to do something that out of my box. But I do understand what she means about making space for God. I just have to figure out the ways that work best for me.

September 4, 2019

I was excited about the opportunity to meet with Susan today. I didn't get to meet with her in August because of all the overwhelming things that were going on in my life

at the time. I felt like I was long overdue for a spiritual reflection on all the things that have transpired in my life recently.

Right off the bat, Susan inquired about how I was doing with all the stuff that had recently occurred in my life. I told her that I was coping, but I don't know if I was actually coping very well as of late. She encouraged me and I thanked her for being one of the few people who understood that the last few months have been taxing.

During our conversation, I explained to her how I had finally resigned from the women's ministry. She congratulated me because she knew how much of a struggle I had with being a leader in this ministry. I relayed to her how I recall our first session where she informed me that I had a choice in being a part of this ministry and how I didn't understand what she was telling me at that time. Now I understand that I have a choice in how I live my life. I don't have to live according to other people's expectations of me. I didn't realize that I had this issue of allowing people's expectations to lead me. I want people to like me and I let that need distract me from my goals and my boundaries.

One of the things that stuck out to me from the conversation was Susan telling me not to take the things that are happening with the church leadership personally. She stated that taking things personally leads to judgement. I related to this because I had lapsed into judgement over the leadership issues. She gave me suggestions of how my husband can leave the church in a positive manner if that is what we choose to eventually do.

The other things that struck me was she told me that I was not only grieving the loss of the family members that recently passed away, but I am also grieving the loss of my oldest child. She told me that the way I was anxious about my daughter's activity was related to some sort of fear. I agreed with her about that although I initially thought that

the fear had to do with my control issues. However, on my drive home, I was struck by something. The realization almost had me in tears on my drive home. I realized that my fears were around losing her. I had lost my mother unexpectedly. I am still affected by that loss. I am trying to protect myself by mentally freaking out about her being out of my sight and out of my control. I feel that if I lose her it would destroy me. Susan told me that it is ok for me to grieve my loss of my daughter. I told her that I don't know how to do that because I have never been taught how to deal with emotions. I was taught to stuff them and avoid them. I think the only emotion that was allowed was anger. Susan suggested that this was the opportune time to start demonstrating self-care. She said I should figure out how to do that by doing things that bring me joy. I had another realization about this recently. I do things that like veg out on tv or read. I do creative things like drawing and fiber art to help me, but I did not realize that it was self-care. It felt self-indulgent and lazy. But it helps me so much because I am able to now think when I do these things. I can flow into whatever I am doing, and my anxiety dissipates during that time.

Susan relayed to me a mindfulness practice that she had recently learned at a workshop. I was familiar with this practice but had not, it in years. The practice is to see the situation that occurs, feel the emotions tied to the situation, and discover what story I am telling myself about the situation and the feelings. In viewing the story, I can look to see if it is a reality. I can also change the story to a more life-giving and positive story. I think this practice is what helped me discover the story I was telling myself about my daughter being away from me.

The final thing I discussed with Susan was an area that God is dealing with me right now. I told her that I knew that my husband and I needed to work together in both business and ministry, but I didn't want us to do what we usually do and that is make rash decisions. I didn't want to allow the current situations with the church to be a pressure that forces us into doing something because we feel we have to in order to leave the situation. She told me that we can take our time and see where God is leading us. I think the next few months will be interesting.

July 23, 2020

What a difference a few weeks make. My conversation with Susan at this point of the pandemic was vastly different from the one I had with her during quarantine. We spent some time talking about the racial injustice issues. I tried to explain to her the frustrations I feel as a Black American. She admitted that she had been blind to the systemic injustices. She has now become intentional about seeking out information and about learning how to be proactive for change. I enjoyed listening to Susan's passionate desire to know more about racial issues. I felt that she may actually pursue this further and not just let it be a passing fancy. Even though I found her efforts encouraging, I explained to her that seeing other White people that I have had relationship with taking the opposite stance has been heartbreaking, especially those who I have shared Christian ministry with. I just keep thinking how I am a human being and how I have a real fear of my husband and sons being out in the world with the threat of police brutality and violence. I have also personally experienced in my short lifetime prejudices. I have witnessed their commentary on social media. They seemed more concerned with statues being taken down than with the actual death of unarmed Black people. I told Susan that

my husband has some conversations with well-meaning White friends about being a Black man in America, but personally I am not interested in having these conversations. There have been some of my former friends who believe BLM is a terrorist group who have tried to contact me like everything is normal. At this time, I haven't really responded. I don't desire a relationship with people who cannot understand the pain of watching someone gun down or put his knee on the neck of a Black man especially when there are videos of White people responding to police officers violently without any repercussions. Susan felt my pain. She told me that I didn't owe anyone anything. She feels that it is time for White people to learn and not for Black people to have to explain or try to get them to listen. Susan made me feel better.

I explained to her that I was also feeling frustration with people once again because of the demands that were once again being made like life is normal. With all the ugliness of society, Susan encouraged me to look to the beauty of God and find ways to appreciate the good.

I told Susan that I started offering spiritual direction in May. I gave her a brief overview of how it was going. I had some anxiety about how to handle the first few sessions because I didn't feel qualified. I told that as time has progressed, I have felt more at ease, especially since my directees are so enthused about the sessions.

January 13, 2021

I met with Susan just days after the Capital Riots that took place on January 6 and a few days before the inauguration of Joe Biden as president. My emotions were all over the place. I had deposited both of my older kids at their respective colleges, and I was fearful for their safety with all of the negativity that was still transpiring in regard to the

presidential election. I told her that all of this that was happening in our country has been traumatic. I told her that from the standpoint of a Black female I did not like to see White Americans storming the capital because it brought up images of the KKK and Jim Crowe. The fact that these people felt secure enough in their rights to barge their way into the national capital and beat up officers and invade the private offices of congress people made me think that they believed they had the right to do anything. I felt like my life and the lives of my loved ones could be in danger. It was so ugly. Susan tried to calm my fears. She brought up the fact that her husband had voted for Trump because he was fearful of socialism having come from Cuba. She tried to get me to see that not all the people who were on the Republican were violent fruitcakes. At the time, I was not receptive to that idea. I do not understand how anyone with any sense could possibly not see that Trump is a hateful, spiteful, greedy man who stirs up conflict and violence in the country. I was trying to hold back my anger against the situation.

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